



Micoto Sakurai
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A Royal Rebound:

*Forget My
Ex-Fiancé,*

I'm Being
Pampered
by
the **Prince**

3





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Chapter 1: An Abnormal Occurrence in the Beltz Empire

Bright sunlight shone in through the window, making Amelia squint. She looked up at the sky above, which was a perfect blue, with not a cloud in sight. Despite the clear weather, however, this year's summer was expected to remain cool, as in years past.

The Royal Magic Research Institute was located within the grounds of the Royal Academy of Magic. There, Amelia was compiling the agricultural data from the year prior. She let out a soft sigh.

Seems we'll have yet another cool summer this year...

Even in her birthplace, situated in the northern region of the kingdom, the summers had been very hot when she was a child. However, over the years, temperatures had been steadily decreasing, to the point that even now, at the height of summer, clear days were few and far between.

Amelia was the daughter of a family of rural nobles, and her homeland, the Lenia domain, contained much farmland. That was why she couldn't help but feel saddened when she considered these continual cool days that felt nothing like summer and the effect they would have on agriculture.

Nevertheless, during these last three years, satisfactory countermeasures against cold-weather damage had been put into practice.

That's right. There's no sense in fretting now.

Amelia jumped to her feet, shaking off her melancholy.

The results of those countermeasures had become apparent little by little, and at present, the harvests of staple grains were returning to their level before the cold-weather damage had grown severe.

The countermeasures that had been particularly effective were the selectively bred grain developed by Sarge, the Kingdom of Bedeiht's fourth prince and Amelia's fiancé, and the enchanted water the two of them had devised together. In addition to those countermeasures, the two of them together had developed many others, such as fertilizer infused with growth promotion magic and a magical tool that made it rain.

Together... All I really did was talk about ideas that came to mind. It was Sarge who actually gave those ideas form.

A gentle smile rose to Amelia's lips as she thought of her beloved.

Sarge could wield not only light magic, which was inherited only by the direct line of the royal family of Bedeiht, but earth magic as well. He also had rich knowledge of botany, and it was due to his repeated experiments with selective breeding that he had been able to produce a grain that was resistant to cold-weather damage.

The grain known as gree, which was the staple food of the entire continent, was planted in spring and harvested in autumn. However, the continual cool summers had significantly reduced its crop yields. This year, gree selectively bred to thrive even in lower temperatures would be planted in most farms throughout the kingdom. Although the new variety of gree was susceptible to insect damage, that problem could be solved using enchanted water, which was infused with magic to protect against insects.

There was no doubt Sarge would be able to solve the food crisis not only within the kingdom but throughout the entire continent as well. That was what Amelia believed.

Being one year older than her, he had already graduated from the academy, but she would also be graduating at the end of this school year. Although they now spent more time apart than before, leaving Amelia feeling a bit lonely, next year would afford them more opportunities to be together.

In fact..

Amelia gazed at her hand—at the engagement ring Sarge had given her.

Next spring, we'll be getting married right after I graduate.

As she gazed at the ring, a smile rose unconsciously to her face.

The ring doubled as a magical tool that informed Sarge immediately if Amelia was in danger. In fact, on the way back from her diplomatic mission to the Kingdom of Janaki last year, she had nearly been kidnapped, and Sarge had saved her when he realized something was wrong.

He had also been the one who created this ring.

Magical tools had been made in abundance in the past but had fallen out of use in recent years. In this kingdom, all those of noble parentage could use magic, so there was not much demand for magical tools, which could only generate simple magic.

Sarge had improved on those magical tools to create ones that could even generate complex magic. Furthermore, since it was the creator who infused the tool with magic rather than the user, magical tools made it possible for people to use magic that differed from their own attribute. The magic that imbued Amelia's engagement ring was light magic, but all Amelia had to do to activate it was pass some magic through it.

This ring made it so Sarge's magic was always protecting her.

I need to work harder too.

Once she and her fiancé wedded, she would become a princess. The education she had to undergo in preparation for that role had filled her days until the summer; she had been too busy to even feel lonely being away from Sarge.

Each day after Amelia returned to the royal castle from the academy, Crown Princess Sophia had been teaching Amelia what she needed to know to become a member of the royal family. That education, however, was currently on pause. The small amount of additional time on her hands must have been the reason for her increased pensiveness lately.

“What’s the matter, Amelia?”

The one who asked Amelia that question when she gazed up at the sky and sighed was Marie, the vice-director of the Royal Magic Research Institute and fiancée to Sarge’s older brother Julius.

“Ah, Marie.”

Amelia turned around and looked at Marie, with her silver curls and stern countenance. Unlike Amelia, who was petite, Marie was tall and slender, and she was an impressive beauty. However, despite what her austere appearance might suggest, she was a very just and kind woman. Two years ago, Marie had been the first one to offer a hand to Amelia, who had been isolated by her classmates due to the scheming of her fiancé at the time, Reese.

For Amelia, who was now engaged to Sarge, Marie was her future sister-in-law. And although Marie was one year older than her, she was a precious, close friend, and the two spoke to each other amiably, without using any titles.

Marie was the same age as Sarge and had likewise already graduated from the academy, but she had taken up the post of vice-director of the laboratory. The director of said laboratory was Third Prince Julius. Marie was frequently at the laboratory acting as Julius’s representative, since he was very busy, but even after graduating from the academy, she still worried over Amelia. That was why Amelia felt she didn’t need to hide anything from Marie, and she spoke her feelings frankly.

“It’s nothing too serious. It’s just, I’m worried about how it doesn’t seem like this summer will get very warm either,” she responded.

Marie nodded. “That’s right—Prince Julius was also worried about that. Your enchanted water and the selectively bred grain that Prince Sarge developed should be fine for the time being. But if the temperature keeps dropping in the future, that might end up not being enough.” Marie was speaking in a serious tone, but when Amelia raised her head to look at her, Marie gave her a gentle smile. “But I’m sure you and Prince Sarge will be able to do something. I really

believe that.”

“...Right.”

Marie was right. Despite all the achievements his research produced, Sarge was always thinking another step ahead and continuing his labors. Even if the cold weather were to continue, Sarge would surely be able to think up a way to solve it.

That was why Amelia remained close by his side, supporting him.

“You’re right. I don’t have the time to get anxious about it,”

Amelia replied with a smile.

Moreover, she wasn’t the only one who was busy. This autumn, Marie would be marrying Julius, so she was likely even busier than Amelia was. And yet she was still paying mind to Amelia like this.

Everyone is so kind.

Reese, her ex-fiancé, had really put her through some terrible things. However, after that incident, Amelia had been blessed to meet the new friends who surrounded her to this day. That was why Amelia wanted to do her very best at what she was able to do, in order to repay that kindness.

Crown Princess Sophia, who had taught Amelia so many things, numbered among those people. The reason their study sessions had been suspended was that the pregnant Sophia was nearing her due date. Crown Prince Alexis, who was now constantly busy traveling to foreign nations, would often return home to see how Sophia was doing.

Alexis was Sarge’s older brother by the same mother and boasted the strongest magical power among the four brothers. When he was a child, he had been unable to control his magical ability and so had been raised separated from his brothers. Perhaps due to that experience, he had an unparalleled love for his family.

Of course that included his younger brothers and his wife, Sophia, but it also included Second Prince Est’s fiancée, Princess Chloe of the Kingdom of Janaki, and Third Prince Julius’s fiancée, Marie. He also doted on Amelia, Fourth Prince Sarge’s fiancée, as if she were his real younger sister. As for Amelia, she truly admired the kind, beautiful Sophia and trusted and respected the crown prince.

There was only so much that Amelia had to give the two of them, and she knew that they would be receiving many other gifts. Nevertheless, she had been thinking hard about a special gift she could give the couple to congratulate them on their first child.

But I really can’t think of what would be a good gift...

Amelia was thinking that over even on the carriage ride back to the castle after the end of the school day.

After becoming engaged to the fourth prince, Amelia had been given a room in the private living quarters of the castle where the

royal family lived. Although she would one day become a princess, she was still just Sarge's fiancée. There were two reasons she was able to live in the private living quarters despite that.

The first was to support Sarge, who continued to devote himself to his research, working to solve the kingdom's food crisis. The prince would become so intent on his research that he would often forget to eat and sleep. Amelia's role, in addition to assisting in his research, was to make sure he didn't become too absorbed in his work.

However, Amelia was actually quite similar in temperament to her fiancé, and there had been many times when the two of them would continue their research well into the early hours of the morning.

I need to take more care too...

It made Amelia feel embarrassed to remember the ways she'd misstepped in the past. She felt she had caused a great deal of trouble for Kaid, Sarge's knight guard, and for Liliane, his fiancée and Amelia's own knight guard.

There was another reason Amelia was permitted to stay in the royal living quarters.

A lot happened with Reese... Amelia thought, recalling her ex-fiancé.

The main reason that she had been given a room in the royal castle was that there had been an incident in which Reese had conspired with an enemy nation, the Beltz Empire, and tried to kidnap Amelia.

While Bedeiht was suffering from cold weather, the empire across the precipitous mountain range had exactly the opposite problem: little to no rainfall and increasing temperatures, which were leading to desertification. Thus, they had been seeking mages who could solve that problem.

Reese was an earth mage, while Amelia was a water mage. They must have seemed the optimal candidates to solve a problem like desertification.

Apparently, the people on this continent who could use magic were dwindling in number. Nearly all nobles in Bedeiht were born with magical ability, but in Janaki, where Chloe was from, only members of the royal family could use magic. Other countries were presently in a similar situation, but it seemed that there was not even a single person who could use proper magic in the Beltz Empire.

There are no mages down south, while up north in Bedeiht, we have many. I wanted to look into why that is.

Since she couldn't easily find out the numbers of mages in other countries, she had just given up on her research at some point. Besides, she had many other things that she needed to prioritize.

In any case, the conditions in the Beltz Empire were much graver

than those in Bedeiht. That was why agents of the empire had contacted Reese and instigated him, with their target being Amelia, who was not only a water mage but Sarge's assistant.

Of course, that plot had failed when Sarge and the other princes had intervened to protect her.

Out of an abundance of caution, she had been given a room in the royal castle, which was much more heavily guarded than her academy dorm, and she had begun commuting to and from school in the same carriage as Sarge.

After the incident, Reese's magical powers had been sealed, and he was now locked away in a prison for nobles who had committed crimes.

Before he entered the royal academy, Reese and Amelia had acted normally towards one another. Amelia had believed that in the future, the two of them would inherit her family's home, the Lenia domain. She was unlikely to forget Reese's betrayal, which she'd never seen coming, but on the other hand, neither was she likely to completely disregard the fate of the man whom she had once believed she'd spend her life with.

I can't believe I'm going to become a member of the royal family. Back then, this is something I never dreamed could happen.

That whole affair had changed the course of Amelia's life dramatically. Despite all that had happened, she was able to move forward with her life because she was very happy now.

"Lady Amelia," a voice suddenly called out to her.

She raised her head to see her knight guard, Liliane, peeking into the carriage through the door. Liliane was one of the few female knights in the kingdom; given their relatively limited physical strength, most women defended themselves with magic rather than taking up the sword. However, no matter how strong a person's magic power was, its use was limited by treaties in other countries. Therefore, female knights trained in the blade were indispensable to distinguished persons who often traveled abroad.

Moreover, Sarge hadn't liked the idea of Amelia having a male guard.

Amelia still hadn't gotten used to having a guard, so she was very glad that Liliane, a woman and one who just looked like an ordinary young lady, was her knight guard.

Liliane's voice brought Amelia's attention back to reality. She looked around and saw that she had at some point arrived at the royal castle. Amelia offered a hasty apology and descended the carriage. "I'm sorry. It seems I was daydreaming."

"Are you quite tired?"

"No, I've just got a lot on my mind," Amelia responded.

Liliane smiled at her gently. "You mustn't push yourself. There are many who would lament it if something were to happen to you."

"...You're right. Thank you," Amelia said, nodding earnestly.

Amelia now knew there were people who cared about her. There were many people whom she treasured, and she knew those same people treasured her as well. Just as she didn't want those people to push themselves, she felt she shouldn't do things that would cause them concern.

Back in the royal castle, Amelia didn't return to her room but rather headed for the crown princess's room, accompanied by Liliane. Sophia and Liliane were close friends who got along very well, and Sophia seemed to look forward to them dropping in occasionally for a chat.

"Amelia, Liliane, come on in."

Sophia was sitting relaxed on the sofa rather than her bed. Her complexion looked good, and she seemed to be in fine health.

Ever since learning Sophia was pregnant, Alexis had been constantly at her side. He was frequently in the room when Amelia came to visit her. Today, however, he was not present.

"Alexis has gone to the Beltz Empire," Sophia told Amelia and Liliane, who had reflexively looked around the room. That was understandable. Indeed, without a reason such as that, Alexis would not have left Sophia's side.

"I was not expecting Crown Prince Alexis to be such a worrier," Liliane said sincerely. Her fiancé, Kaid, was Sarge's knight guard, but Liliane had also been a friend of Alexis during their school days. She must have known him well and was evidently quite surprised at his overprotectiveness for Sophia once she became pregnant.

However, Amelia felt his concern was understandable. Any child of Alexis, who had the strongest magical power among his brothers and was the crown prince, would surely be born with the light magic attribute.

All those born in the direct royal line of the Kingdom of Bedeiht could use light magic. There were four princes: Crown Prince Alexis and Fourth Prince Sarge were the sons of the queen, while Second Prince Est and Third Prince Julius were the sons of the king's concubine. All four could use light magic, but only Alexis, as the eldest son and the crown prince, would pass on light magic to his children. Therefore, the child that was soon to be born would undoubtedly have strong magic ability like Alexis as well as light magic.

However, giving birth to children with strong light magic put quite a lot of strain on the mother. Sophia had been chosen as the crown princess, so naturally, she also had considerable magical

ability. Nevertheless, Alexis cared deeply for Sophia and must have been unable to help himself from worrying about her.

Alexis himself had been unable to control his magic as a child, so he had lived separately from his brothers. He must have been thinking of his own past as well.

Oh, that's right.

A thought suddenly came to Amelia, and she mulled it over.

Members of the aristocracy who had committed crimes, like Reese had, had their magic sealed. It was done with a magical tool so strong that it completely cut off the wearer's magic power.

If that tool could be adjusted to make it so the wearer's magic wasn't completely severed but only weakened slightly, then perhaps that could be useful for children who had yet to learn how to control their own power.

Sometimes, children with strong magical ability accidentally unleashed it or unintentionally hurt people around them. Since they were children, it was natural for them to feel upset when they didn't get their way or were scolded. Those natural emotions would cause them to lose control of their magic and lash out.

It was for that very reason that Alexis had been quarantined when he was a child. He must have been worried that the same thing would happen to his soon-to-be-born child. If she could make a magical tool that could erase that worry, wouldn't that make a great celebratory gift for the birth of the royal couple's child? That was the idea that came into Amelia's mind.

I'll consult with Sarge later.

After enjoying some time chatting with Sophia and Liliane, Amelia returned to her room. She changed her clothes and then headed for the library reserved for the royal family, where she was sure Sarge would be again that day.

There was also a large library in the royal castle, but it was constantly frequented by various types of people. Despite the civil officials who were always present, Sarge would often pull all-nighters there. Therefore, for the protection of both himself and his research, his brothers had built a library for his exclusive use within the royal living quarters.

Ever since then, Sarge had been spending most of his time in that library. In fact, it was less like a library than his private research room.

Last year, after graduating from the Royal Academy of Magic, he had only become more prone to spending time there. No matter how safe that library might have been in terms of security, pulling several all-nighters in a row was going to take a toll on his health. That was why Amelia tried to spend as much time with him as she could after

school. Sarge, who was passionate about his research and often paid no heed to others' opinions, only ever really listened to Amelia.

It makes me happy, but...it's also a lot of responsibility.

Amelia was also prone to becoming absorbed in research, and that sense of responsibility was what kept her in check. The ones who had entrusted Sarge to her care also worried about her. Amelia felt she needed to look after her own health as well as Sarge's, to reciprocate their consideration of her.

After having opened the doors to the library, Amelia found Sarge with his nose in a magic tome. She approached him, taking care not to disturb him. Sarge had been intently focused on the materials in front of him, his face serious, but he immediately noticed Amelia's presence and turned to her with a smile.

"Oh, Amelia. You're home."

His hair was a shining golden blond, and his features resembled those of the queen, who was famous for her beauty.

When Amelia had first met him, he had appeared to be on the thinner side. However, after he had graduated from the academy in the spring and reached the kingdom's age of majority, she felt he had grown to look stronger and more masculine.

As she was unintentionally gazing at him in admiration, Sarge closed his tome and guided Amelia to take a seat next to him.

"Yes. I dropped by big sister Sophia's room on the way here," she informed him.



Sophia had declared that although Amelia was still merely Sarge's fiancée, she should address her as an older sister. True to her own words, Sophia also treated Amelia like she was her younger sister.

"I see."

Hearing Sophia's name, Sarge's face softened. Alexis was the only one of Sarge's brothers who shared the same mother, but all four princes got along well regardless. Which meant, of course, that the brothers also got along well with their eldest brother's wife and were eagerly awaiting the birth of their child.

"Prince Alexis was absent, but Sophia looked healthy and cheerful. I heard he's gone to the Beltz Empire."

"Yes, he has. But knowing Alec, he's sure to return soon," Sarge responded with a laugh.

Light magic was used exclusively by those in the direct royal line and was incredibly powerful, so it was normally restricted and not permissible to use freely. But considering the present circumstances, transportation magic was permitted to allow for instant travel between countries.

Alexis used that magic to frequently visit the Beltz Empire, where the new Emperor Carloyd had just ascended the throne. The Beltz Empire was the nation situated on the other side of the steep mountain range. Only a short while ago, the empire had been hostile to the Kingdom of Bedeiht, and even now, after Carloyd's accession to the throne, not a few people still supported the idea of invading the nations on this side of the mountain range, as the late emperor, Carloyd's predecessor, had wanted.

Furthermore, there were also rumors that Emperor Carloyd's younger brothers might still have their eyes on the imperial throne. Carloyd did not have many allies within the empire; although he had once been the crown prince, his father had locked him away due to his opposition to invading foreign nations.

However, in order to avoid further conflict, Bedeiht was offering support to Carloyd. They were also providing the empire with the magical tools that produced rain—tools that Amelia had devised and Sarge created.

The reason the Beltz Empire had targeted members of the Bedeiht royal family and was even planning to invade the land on the other side of the dangerous mountains in the first place was that their own land was undergoing desertification, which had led to a food shortage. If they could just gradually resolve that issue and allow the citizens of the empire to live peacefully, that would surely solidify Carloyd's position as well.

However, Alexis's dear wife was very shortly about to give birth,

so he was returning to the kingdom much more often than usual.

“Doesn’t repeatedly using transportation magic over such a long distance put a strain on Alexis?” Amelia asked reflexively out of concern.

Sarge, however, assured her that there was no problem. “That might be something only Alec can do, though.”

Alexis’s magical power surpassed even that of the brothers’ father, the current king of Bedeiht. Alexis must have been fretting over his unborn child and his wife precisely because he understood that fact.

“Um, I actually wanted to consult with you about a gift for big sister Sophia.”

Amelia felt badly about stealing time away from Sarge, who was always so busy, but she spoke up anyway, wanting to tell him her idea.

“Did you come up with a good idea?”

Relieved by his kind prompting, she told him about the magical tool idea she’d thought of earlier.

“Yes. Seeing as the baby will be the child of Prince Alexis and big sister Sophia, I was thinking it will very likely have strong magic.”

“Yes, you’re probably right.”

The reason Alexis had been stressing so much over Sophia must have been obvious even to Sarge.

“I was thinking it’d be nice to be able to create a magical tool that could control the baby’s power until it grows up and learns how to do so on its own,” she proposed, despite her nervousness.

In this kingdom, only those who had committed crimes had their magic sealed. It would probably have been irreverent to give something like that to the son of the crown prince, so voicing the suggestion filled her with anxiety, but Sarge agreed with a gentle expression.

“That’s right. If they had something like that, I’m sure my brother would feel more at ease. But if the baby’s magic is completely blocked, it won’t be able to learn how to control its power, so we’d have to develop something that only restricts it,” he said. He already seemed prepared to jump right into thinking of ways to design such a tool.

The bracelets that completely sealed magical power had existed in this kingdom for a long time, and Amelia did not know exactly when they were created. It was possible that the magic imbued in the tool was the very light magic that could only be used by royalty.

The tools had first been used long ago, and their construction hadn’t changed much since that time. Due to the abundance of mages, magical tools had not undergone much development in this kingdom. Was it truly all right to put something that was the mark of a criminal,

no matter how much they modified it, on Alexis's child?

Sarge had readily accepted the idea, but it would probably be best to consult Julius about this sort of matter rather than Sarge.

Julius, who was just one year older than Sarge, had assisted his younger brother in saving Amelia when she'd been suffering at the hands of her ex-fiancé two years ago. While Julius was very kind towards his family, he also had a strict side. Someone like him would surely be able to help her think through the best course of action. Like Marie, Julius was busy with preparing for the wedding, which was to be held in the autumn, so today, she was once again unable to speak with him.

What should I do? Is it really all right for me to impose on him with a personal matter, as busy as he is?

Although he would surely welcome her with open arms, whatever she may need, she still felt sorry about it.

She fretted over what she should do.

However, the next day, after Amelia returned from the academy, her maid informed her that Second Prince Est had called for her.

Prince Est is asking for me?

Second Prince Est, who had the same mother as Julius, was of weak constitution, and even after becoming an adult, he had remained uninvolved in most public affairs. Now that it had been decided to renew his engagement to Chloe, a princess of the Kingdom of Janaki, he was gradually beginning to make more public appearances.

Est had consulted Amelia about Chloe before, but this was likely the first time she would meet with him alone. That was why she was left wondering what sort of important matter he could have with her.

Maybe this does have something to do with Princess Chloe. It seems like even when she has an issue, she becomes reserved and has difficulty speaking with Prince Est about it...

It was the fact that Est was waiting for her in the royal castle's library that made her think so. Since their engagement hadn't yet become official, Chloe could not yet enter the library in the royal family's private living quarters. Surely that meant Chloe was there with him and she wanted to consult with Amelia about something that was troubling her.

Contrary to Amelia's expectations, Est was alone in the library.

Est's long hair was the same black as Julius's, and his eyes were the same blue as Alexis's. While Alexis and Julius took after their father the king, Est and Sarge took after their own respective mothers. However, the queen and the king's concubine were cousins, so the four princes resembled each other quite a bit and got along well.

As an only child, Amelia was a bit envious of the brothers and their good relationship. They would all soon become siblings-in-law,

though. That thought filled her heart with a soft warmth. She was very happy that she would become family to those kind princes who always showed her such concern.

“Apologies for calling you here so suddenly,” said Est as he urged Amelia to take a seat. She sat in the seat opposite him. “The truth is, there’s something I want to ask you.”

After he said that, he spread out some documents on the desk. Following his gaze, Amelia saw that they appeared to relate to the Royal Academy of Magic.

“Are these from the academy...?”

“That’s right. Two years ago, after that incident you were involved in, I thought it was necessary to reform how problems within the academy were dealt with.”

It was just as Est had said: by orchestrating that whole affair, Reese had incited others—students who weren’t originally involved—to jump on the opportunity to harass Amelia. Fortunately for her, she had come to know Sarge, who had saved her from that situation.

However, as a result, Reese, Sarah, and Emilla had been expelled, and three other female students had been suspended—one who had tried to spill tea on Amelia in the dining hall and two girls whom Emilla had incited to give false testimony.

Est, who had learned about the incident through his two younger brothers, had been searching for ways to amend the status quo at the academy.

Amelia had not known about this until after the fact, but Est had also been involved in establishing the Special A class, which only allowed in students of exceptional ability, regardless of their year in school, to provide them with a more suitable environment for learning.

“It’s important to maintain order, but when it comes to high-ranking nobles committing wrongdoings, the problem is having no one there to rebuke them for their actions. Now that Sarge has graduated, there won’t be another member of the royal family at the academy for a dozen years or so.”

“Yes, you’re right,” Amelia said in agreement.

Just as Est said, the next member of the royal family who would enroll in the Royal Academy of Magic would be Alexis’s soon-to-be-born child.

“Though even if there were royalty present, that wouldn’t really change much, would it?” Est said with a troubled laugh.

Indeed, when that incident involving Amelia had taken place, Julius and Sarge had both been at the academy as a third- and a second-year, respectively.

However, those who used their status to oppress others also took a

deferential attitude towards those of higher rank. It would not have been unreasonable to think that without an incident like the one involving Amelia, none of this would ever have come to light.

Moreover, Julius and Sarge had both been much more preoccupied with solving the issues the kingdom was facing than with internal school matters. Until recently, the kingdom had been suffering from yearly cold-weather damage to crops, and efforts had been focused on securing the nation's food supply. Now that Sarge's research had borne results, they could afford more time for domestic reforms.

Est's changes to the governance of the academy were a part of those planned reforms.

"My father has dictated that I become the headmaster of the Royal Academy of Magic and enact some internal reforms. It may be painful for you to remember, but I'd like you to tell me in more detail what happened."

"The headmaster...?"

As she would find out later, the present headmaster, while a brilliant person, was apparently not of very high status and could not exercise a firm hand in dealing with the sons and daughters of high-ranking nobles. Even though the headmaster had been selected based on personal merit, it was impossible to enact reforms if students would not obey them. However, with Est in charge, the academy could surely see some changes. That was why Amelia wanted to cooperate as much as she could.

"Yes, understood."

Est had made an effort to be considerate of her feelings, but in fact, it wasn't that painful to remember what had happened. Plus, now that she thought about it, the climate within the school at that time had been strange.

Even if Amelia and Reese had been quarreling over their engagement, it was a problem that should have been resolved between the two of them. Yet despite that, Amelia had for some reason been scorned by her classmates.

Reese might have been skillful in his scheming, but that must not have been all there was to it.

There's no problem with persecuting others who are below your station.

That had been the accepted way of things in the academy at the time. It must have been an idea that had come into existence not just in the past few years but many years ago.

In fact, considering that the third and fourth princes had been present in school at that time, Amelia felt the atmosphere had to have been even worse in the years when no members of the royal family were attending the academy. Although the incidents may not have

come to light, it was possible there were others who had gone through the same thing Amelia had. Thinking that, she felt she was incredibly lucky to have come to know Julius and Sarge.

In that case, if my experience can prove to be informative for the reforms...

As Amelia recalled the past, she explained in minute detail what had happened.

The impetus behind her ostracism.

The responses of those around her.

How things had been in the classroom.

And finally, the changes she had observed in those she had thought were her friends.

Est listened to Amelia's story all the way to the end without interrupting, his face stern the entire time.

"Yes, I do think it was less that your ex-fiancé was a masterful schemer and more that the school environment made it possible for so many people to take advantage of the situation. I'm sorry for making you relive something so difficult," Est said apologetically.

Amelia shook her head. "Not at all. I'm just fine. After all, Sarge, Julius, and Marie all became my friends." She wasn't trying to put on a front; she sincerely meant her words.

After a bit more discussion, Est muttered, "I didn't actually attend the academy myself, you know. I never thought I would one day become its headmaster."

After saying that, he gave her a gentle smile that reminded her of Sarge's.

Amelia had heard that due to his poor health, Est had not attended the academy and had instead studied under a home tutor.

"If you want to know more about how things presently are at the academy, it might be best to ask Princess Chloe. I spend most of my time in the laboratory, so I don't know much about the current situation..."

Amelia had only spent half a year attending the academy's regular classes. A lot of time had passed since then, so the situation had likely changed.

Est nodded at her suggestion and said, "Yes, you're right. I'll ask Chloe for her help too."

On Est's arm was the magical tool bracelet Chloe had made for him.

That was the magical tool Amelia had taught Chloe, Sophia, and Julius how to make; it was filled with simple healing magic. Sophia had made one for her husband, Alexis; Julius for his fiancée, Marie; and Chloe for Est.

Est seemed to treasure the magical tool. Seeing it on him made

Amelia happy, and she couldn't help but smile.

Magical tools... Ah, that's right. Maybe I should consult with Prince Est about that too.

Since Julius was busy, she would have felt bad calling on him just to ask him something. Meanwhile—although Est was also quite busy, seeing as he was going to be enacting reforms at the academy—she was already in the middle of a meeting with him, so she felt perhaps it was all right to bring it up now.

“Um, I actually have something I want to ask you about,” she began, broaching the subject.

Est, who was spreading out the academy documents, raised his head and looked at Amelia. “Of course, I'll gladly hear you out if you'd like me to.”

Amelia had felt a bit nervous bringing it up, but hearing Est's kind reply put her at ease. “It's about the magic-sealing bracelet that those who were expelled from the academy wear.”

“The magic-sealing bracelets? So you want to ask about those who were expelled?”

“Not exactly. Um...the truth is, I was thinking of creating a magical tool that wouldn't completely block a person's magic but weaken it.”

Amelia told Est about her idea of giving Alexis's child a magical tool capable of restraining a person's magical power.

“But magic-sealing bracelets feel like a mark of criminality, so I'm worried that giving such a thing as a gift would be disrespectful.”

After hearing her explanation, Est looked as though he was deep in thought. “...I see what you're saying. If we were able to restrain the baby's power until it could control itself, then it wouldn't end up being sequestered like Alec was. However, the magic-sealing bracelets completely block magical power, so the effect would need to be adjusted. That will be difficult, and the tool has never been used for any other purpose before.”

Est explained how magic-sealing bracelets had been created during the time when magic was still used for war. During that era, there had been a member of the royal family who was proficient at making magical tools and had used light magic to create the magic-sealing bracelet, which had then been passed down to present time.

“But I think someone as knowledgeable about magic as Sarge would be able to do it.”

“Yes, I consulted with him earlier, and he kindly said he would attempt to develop it. But he couldn't judge whether it's all right to give it as a gift or not.”

“Ah, yes. That is not exactly his area of expertise. But he's the person most knowledgeable about magical tools in this kingdom. I'm

sure he'll be able to make a magical tool that fulfills its intended purpose."

Since there were so many people who could wield magic in the Kingdom of Bedeiht, magical tools were not often used. However, ever since Sarge had given Amelia that ring imbued with protection magic, he'd also been researching magical tools in earnest.

Amelia felt that he would be the one capable of creating a magical tool with an effect similar to that of the magic-sealing bracelets for Sophia's sake.

Est was in agreement with Amelia's idea. "I believe if you were to give her a magic-sealing bracelet in unaltered form, that might be an issue, but a magical tool made by you and Sarge will be just fine."

The fruits of their research and the magical tools the two of them had created were highly regarded not just within the kingdom but in other nations as well. Est told her that proudly.

"...Thank you for saying that."

The one truly worthy of that praise was Sarge; all Amelia had done was assist him. Yet her fiancé told her it was all thanks to her being with him.

Not only Est but Alexis and Julius held Amelia in high esteem. So instead of being excessively humble and denying his words, Amelia gratefully accepted them as praise from her family.

"Moreover, magic-sealing bracelets aren't permanent things. Especially in the case of those who are still students, if the crimes weren't particularly malicious, they can still reenter society if they're able to turn their lives around."

That was unlikely to happen for Reese, who had committed treason against the kingdom. However, Amelia wished that at least the others who had been involved in the incident would be able to redeem themselves and reintegrate into society.

After thanking Est and leaving the library, Amelia headed to see Sarge. As usual, he was in the library in the royal living quarters, reading intently through some documents. He seemed particularly focused today, as he didn't notice Amelia even when she entered the library and approached him.

In order not to disrupt his work, Amelia decided to sit in a spot a little farther away and organize her own data. She compared last year's data from her homeland, the Lenia domain, as well as from other domains that were cooperating and made note of the differences.

As I thought, no matter how many measures we take, the lands that had earth magic cast on them produce an incomparably larger harvest. I wonder how much the growth-promoting fertilizer will be able to bridge that gap...

The fertilizer that Amelia had invented hadn't yet come into use throughout the kingdom, but they were planning to eventually export it to the Kingdom of Janaki. It was precisely because they were going to sell it abroad that they had to make sure it met a certain standard of safety and quality.

I'd like more data for that. But it will be kind of hard to get my hands on it.

Earth mages were scarce even in Bedeiht. Amelia herself only knew of three: her ex-fiancé, Reese; her current fiancé, Sarge; and lastly, Meena, the younger sister of Sarge's knight guard, Kaid. Meena was going to marry Amelia's cousin Sol and inherit the Lenia domain with him.

The amount of fertilizer the kingdom was able to mass-produce would become important hereafter.

"Amelia."

Amelia lifted her head when she suddenly heard someone calling her name. Julius, who had come in at some point, was peering at her.

"Oh, Julius!" she unwittingly exclaimed in surprise.

"Ah, sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. It's almost dinnertime, so maybe you should take a quick break."

"Yes, my apologies."

Amelia had gotten so absorbed in reading through her data that more time had passed than she'd realized. She hastily looked over in Sarge's direction, where she saw him still poring over the documents he had at hand. His expression was unusually grim.

Sarge?

Amelia turned her gaze to Julius, wondering if something had happened.

"I heard this from Alec, but there's apparently a problem with the rain-producing magical tools we lent to the Beltz Empire," Julius explained to Amelia after he, too, looked at Sarge with concern.

What?

Shocked, Amelia took a closer look at the documents near Sarge.

She was sure he hadn't brought up anything like that when speaking to her this morning. Alexis must have talked to him about it after returning from the empire, while Amelia was at school.

"It's not as if it doesn't work—it does in fact produce rain. But no matter how much magic is channeled into it initially, the magic stone is quickly used up," Sarge muttered, as if to himself. It seemed Julius's words had actually reached his ears.

That was the reason Sarge hadn't even noticed Amelia return: he was so preoccupied with this matter.

"The ones we used here in the kingdom didn't exhibit any abnormalities. And the ancient magic language used for the spell isn't

wrong either. In that case, the reason has to be...”

As if he'd forgotten the presence of the other two people in the room with him, Sarge's attention was completely focused on analyzing the magical tool.

Is it only in the Beltz Empire that the tool doesn't work normally?

Perplexed, Amelia looked at Julius.

The cause was unclear, but if the empire was the only place where the tools didn't work properly, then that could invite some backlash against Bedeiht on the part of the imperial nobles.

Emperor Carloyd had very few allies as it was. And now he had been fooled by the Kingdom of Bedeiht and allowed them to foist their malfunctioning magical tools on the empire. That would exacerbate the people's mistrust of him, giving his brothers an opening to the throne, which they hadn't yet given up on.

If that happened, then the peace that had been painstakingly maintained on this continent would crumble again. Not merely Bedeiht but Janaki—the kingdom that bordered the empire on the opposite side of the mountain range—would undoubtedly feel the repercussions.

Those were the expectations that weighed heavily upon Sarge's magical tool. Knowing that, Julius and Amelia could only stand there motionless, not wanting to say anything careless.

However, Amelia was worried. Sarge had probably been working hard without taking a break even after speaking with Alexis. Thinking his complexion looked paler than usual, she reached out her hand without thinking and touched his cheek.

“...Amelia?”

Perhaps startled by her unexpected behavior, Sarge raised his head and looked at her.

Seeing he was pallid as she had thought, Amelia pulled his hand close to her.

“You seem very tired. Please, rest a little.”

“But...” Sarge directed his gaze to the top of the desk, hesitating. Amelia desperately squeezed his hand, and he soon nodded, giving in. “All right. I'll do as you say, Amelia.”

Julius had been watching over them from the side. He sighed in relief when he heard his brother say that. “Thanks, Amelia. If not for you, I wouldn't be able to get him to take a break when he's like that. Really, you're a big help.”

“Not at all. I'm also concerned about him.”

The two of them exchanged those words in quiet whispers. Then, saying it was better for Sarge to rest than eat at the moment, they brought him back to his room. Succumbing to his exhaustion, Sarge collapsed into sleep, so Julius carried him all the way to his bed.

Amelia and Julius decided to let him sleep until morning—once he was out, it was difficult to wake him again—and then they made their way to the dining room together. Alexis, Sophia, and Est were awaiting their arrival.

“Julius, where’s Sarge?” Crown Prince Alexis asked immediately.

“Amelia got him to take a break. He’s worn out, so we should just let him sleep.”

“...I see.”

Alexis looked conflicted, and he lapsed into silence right after saying that.

They went ahead and finished up dinner with their regular group—minus Sarge—and then retired to the parlor.

Their custom was to drink tea and chat after dinner. However, the pregnant Sophia returned to her room first. Normally, Alexis would have accompanied her, but today, after escorting her to her room, he returned to the parlor.

Alexis, Est, Julius, and Amelia each relaxed in their preferred spots and spoke of various things. Today’s topic of conversation was, of course, the rain-producing magical tool.

“Based on Sarge’s explanation, one magic stone should be able to make it rain for a long period of time over a fairly large area.

However, when the tools were actually used in the Beltz Empire, the stone wasn’t able to produce rain for very long, although the magic did cover a large area.”

“That can’t be...”

In fact, when Carloyd had attempted using the magical tool after having just ascended the throne, the tool had functioned correctly. Alexis was well aware of that, having been present when Carloyd had done so.

Plus, the magic that produced rain was water magic, which meant Amelia had also been deeply involved in the tool. She and Sarge had experimented with the tool over and over, and they had paid very careful attention to the magic stone they had used too.

Amelia couldn’t readily accept that after all that, the tool wasn’t operating correctly.

“For now, I brought a tool back with me and had Sarge try it out, and it was able to produce rain for an extended period of time, as he had described. It really seems to malfunction only in the empire.”

Amelia had no reply.

Of course it wasn’t intentional, and the tool was working fine in Bedeiht.

But just hearing that explanation, it wouldn’t have been unusual for people to think that the kingdom had forced the empire to accept unsatisfactory goods that quickly used up their power supply, all in an

attempt to keep selling expensive magic stones.

Plus, until the previous emperor had passed away, Bedeiht hadn't had diplomatic relations with the empire—rather, they'd had a hostile relationship. There were likely many people who were opposed to receiving help from a former enemy nation. In that sort of political climate, the failure of the magical tool would give them just the excuse they needed.

“Did you also confirm that the tool doesn't work as it should?” Est asked.

Alexis nodded. “I did, many times. But no matter how many times I tried, it didn't work properly in the empire. In fact, I was told the small amount of rain that did fall actually made the drought worse. Not even Sarge could figure out the reason for that.”

Amelia looked down, wringing her hands in silence. She understood just how intensely Sarge was working on all this, so it was very frustrating to hear that he was now suspected of palming off a fake product on the empire, and that the tools had actually worsened the drought.

Furthermore, Bedeiht had offered the rain-producing magical tools out of their own goodwill. Did the empire really perceive this as a plot to force them to buy magic stones?

“In that case, should we stop supplying them with the magical tools for the time being?” asked Julius stiffly. He seemed to have had a similar train of thought.

“I think so, seeing as how they're defective. However...”

The reason Alexis didn't want to come right out and finish his sentence was that Emperor Carloyd, who lacked allies among the nobility, deemed those rain-producing magical tools essential for garnering the support of the empire's citizens.

Within the kingdom, there were also those of the opinion that they shouldn't have to go to such great lengths for the Beltz Empire.

However, if Emperor Carloyd were to lose his position, the peace of this continent could fall apart.

Magic was so powerful that if, in the worst-case scenario, war broke out among the nations, the Kingdom of Bedeiht was sure to come out of it with an overwhelming victory.

If this continent, which had come so far, was laid waste by war, there was no telling how long it would take to recover. Not to mention, other countries would see more lives lost through starvation than through the war itself.

No country even had the reserves to fight a war against the others. That was why Bedeiht was lending their strength to other countries: in order to preserve the peace of their own kingdom. After all, among starving nations, the one well-off country would become a target. The

Beltz Empire had, in fact, been planning to steal fertile land from others rather than solve their own desertification crisis.

“In any case, we can’t put the whole burden on Sarge. Let’s try to find another way to solve this.”

After that declaration from Alexis, they dispersed.

Amelia didn’t feel like returning to her room right away and instead headed for the library in the private quarters. There, she noticed that something had been left behind on the desk.

This is...

It looked like a sheaf of documents relating to the magic-sealing bracelet. Sarge must have been researching it until Alexis had returned home.

After hearing her out, he had immediately gotten to work on plans for the tool and was assembling those materials.

He did something that was thought to be so difficult so easily...

She wouldn’t have expected anything less from him, but he had too much on his plate right now to be involved in this. She wished there were something she could do, but she had no way of comprehending light magic; it didn’t even require incantations, so there were no texts she could study.

Suddenly, she felt the presence of another person, and she turned around to see that Julius and Est had just entered the library.

“Oh, Prince Est, Julius...”

“Amelia?”

After seeing it was her, the two princes looked relieved.

“We noticed someone was in here, so we thought Sarge had woken up.”

Apparently they had both been worried that was the case and had come to check on him.

“My apologies for causing confusion,” Amelia said hurriedly, but both Julius and Est told her not to worry.

“If only there were something we could do to help,” Julius muttered, looking around at the room where Sarge spent so much of his time.

Reflecting on Julius’s words, Amelia decided that while she had the chance, it would be a good idea to collect data on the magic stones used for the tools. The rain-producing magical tool utilized water magic, and Julius was, like her, a water mage, so he would be able to help her in creating the magic stones.

“I’d like to try making various types of magic stones. Would you be willing to help me with that?”

“Oh, of course,” Julius responded, nodding vigorously at Amelia’s request.

“Thank you. I think we should try to compile data on various

stones for future reference,” she said, then picked up the documents relating to the magical tool that Sarge had created. “I can’t do anything with regard to this, but I can at least help in some way when it comes to water magic.”

“Is that what you brought up earlier?”

Est seemed to have noticed that the documents in Amelia’s hands pertained to the magic-sealing bracelet.

“Yes. It seems he’s already gotten all the information together.”

“He never fails to impress,” said Est with admiration, but Julius, who had no knowledge of what they were talking about, looked confused.

“What do you mean by ‘what she brought up earlier’?”

“I’m actually thinking about giving big sister Sophia a magical tool as a present. I was consulting with Sarge about it.”

Amelia explained to the perplexed Julius that she wanted to give Sophia a tool that could restrain magic power as a gift for the birth of her child.

“I see. I’m sure Alec would be very happy to receive something like that.”

They hadn’t had the chance to speak about it until now, but Julius also seemed to approve of the idea of creating such a tool.

However, they could hardly have asked Sarge to begin working on the tool right now; it would probably be some time before he had the opportunity.

“I can take care of this, then,” said Est. From Amelia, he accepted the materials Sarge had compiled for the development of the magic-sealing bracelet. He swept a glance over them, then nodded.

“He’s written down everything in great detail, so I think even I can work from this. I can’t do anything for the rain-producing tool, but this is another story.”

“Thank you so much!” Amelia had been worrying a great deal over what to do, so Est’s offer was greatly appreciated.

“Let’s all do what we can, just as Sarge is doing,” said Julius. Amelia and Est both nodded.

And so Julius was going to help with collecting the data on the rain-producing magical tool, while Est was going to help with modifying the magic-sealing bracelet.

Est took the documents back to his room, and Amelia and Julius worked hard late into the night creating the magic stones. With the stones created, they could collect data on them tomorrow.

The next morning, Amelia took the magic stones and headed for the academy.

Sarge was still asleep, but once he was awake, he would undoubtedly throw himself back into his research, so it was best to let

him sleep until he awoke on his own.

When Amelia arrived at the laboratory, Julius was already there. Marie was also there by his side. The two of them must have been very busy with the preparations for their wedding in the fall, but they had both come to help with Amelia's experiments.

"...I really appreciate this."

Since she knew how busy they were, she had said that the help she'd received in creating the magic stones was enough, but both Julius and Marie had taken the initiative to assist her.

"Don't worry about it. I'm grateful that I can actually help with something. We've really put all the responsibility on Sarge to develop these magical tools," said Julius.

"You shouldn't push yourself either, Amelia. If something were to happen to you, Prince Sarge wouldn't be able to focus on his research."

Amelia nodded earnestly at Marie's words. She needed to take proper care of herself in order for Sarge to be able to devote himself to his research.

They used a magic training area to run repeated experiments, but they found no flaws with the rain-producing magical tool; it worked as intended, and the magic stone was not completely consumed with one use.

"It really seems like there are only issues when it's used in the Beltz Empire," muttered Julius, his expression tense.

They went ahead and recorded the data, but all the values were normal, so they didn't seem likely to prove informative in any way. Still, Amelia decided to summarize the figures to show to Sarge later.

She thanked Julius for his help and returned to the laboratory with Marie.

"Speaking of, I heard Prince Est is going to become the headmaster of the academy starting next year," Marie said in a hushed voice as they walked down the hallway.

"That's right. Did he also ask you about that incident?"

"He did. I was in the same year as Reese and Sarah, after all. He asked me about the conditions in the school at that time, and what my friendships were like. But I didn't have any friends back then, so I couldn't give him many details."

Sarge had been in the same year as Marie and Reese, but he had been immersed in his own research, and other students were unlikely to have shown their tyrannical behavior in front of him.

Evidently, Est was persevering with his investigation. Also, if he really needed to, he could use reenactment magic to get a feel for how things had been in the academy at the time.

In any case, the existence of reenactment magic had come to be

public knowledge due to the incident involving Amelia. With Est, who could use reenactment magic, as the new headmaster, there would probably be a reduction in the number of students causing problems. While that would likely be enough to keep things in check, what Est was striving for was not surface-level change but true reform.

"I'm also going to do everything I can as the vice-director of the institute. The things we do here will affect the kingdom's future, after all. I really need to do my best," Marie said, her eyes filled with resolve.

Without a doubt, the academy would be completely transformed in the near future.

When the end of the school day came, Amelia stopped her work and hurried back to the castle. Sarge, who must have been awake by now, was undoubtedly holed up in the library again.

Last night he had gone to bed without dinner, so Amelia wondered if he had eaten breakfast. With that worry planted in her mind, she skipped changing her clothes and, still wearing her school uniform, headed for the library in the private quarters.

"Ah..."

There, she found not only Sarge but Alexis and Julius. The three of them were discussing something, their expressions serious.

"Oh, Amelia, you're back."

The first one to notice her was Julius. At his voice, Alexis and Sarge raised their heads.

After a good night's rest, Sarge's complexion looked better. Seeing that, Amelia sighed with relief.

"We experimented with the magical tool today by switching out different magic stones. Amelia has compiled that data."

Julius's explanation prompted Amelia to hastily take out the documents she'd compiled and hand them over to Sarge.

"Here they are. We tried making the magic stones using different gems and minerals. These are the results of the experiments we ran using the same magical tool and only changing the magic stones."

With a serious expression, Sarge carefully studied the data Amelia had presented to him.

"...As I thought, they're all the same."

"That's right. In our kingdom, I think we might get the same results no matter how many times we experiment."

"Meaning the cause of the defects has something to do with the Beltz Empire," said Sarge. Then he stopped leafing through the documents and looked up at Alexis. "Let me go to the Beltz Empire. I don't think we'll find our answer unless we experiment in the place itself."

"...To the empire?"

Alexis did not immediately approve Sarge's request, but he must have known as well as Sarge did that since they could not detect any defects in the tool when using it within the kingdom, the only option was to run experiments in the Beltz Empire.

But the current situation in the empire was very unstable; the magical tools introduced by Bedeiht had caused divisions among the imperial aristocracy. Alexis had to have been worried about sending Sarge to the empire under those sorts of conditions.

"I'll go with him," said Julius. "It's better that you and Sarge don't both leave the kingdom at the same time. And if we go with too large a group, we'll invite needless suspicion. So Kaid and I can go, and a few other knights as guards. That should be enough."

Alexis was the crown prince, and the next in line to the throne after him was his brother by the same mother, Sarge.

That seemed to be the reason that Julius had nominated himself to go—in order to avoid having both of them absent from the kingdom at the same time.

Moreover, Sophia was soon to give birth. Given how concerned Alexis was about his wife, he probably wanted to be with her.

"...Hmm, all right." Alexis had mulled it over for a while, but he seemed to agree that the inventor of the tool would have to go. "I guess if I want to solve any of this, I have no choice but to let Sarge go. Julius and Kaid, and a few handpicked knights..."

Silently listening to the crown prince's words, Amelia instinctively looked at Sarge.

And me...

She wanted to go with him and assist with his research.

But if the Beltz Empire was a dangerous place right now, then maybe she would just be an encumbrance.

"Don't forget Amelia." Having understood Amelia's look, Sarge gave her a kind smile and extended his hand to her. "I want to bring her with me. She is essential to my research at this point."

"Sarge..."

She had always wanted to be indispensable to him.

She wanted to be not just his fiancée but also his assistant, someone with whom he could talk on equal footing.

And now she had been able to hear those words from his own mouth.

"I need your support in order to solve this problem, Amelia. Will you come with me?"

"...Yes, I will." Amelia nodded vigorously while grasping his hand. "I also *want* to go with you."

Alexis looked worried, but realizing they were both firm in their resolve, he gave his approval.

“All right, then. As for knights, I’ll have Kaid and Liliane go with you, so it will be you three plus those two.”

The timing was perfect too, since the academy’s summer holiday was about to begin.

Amelia wouldn’t be able to return home for the summer, but Meena and Sol would be going to the Lenia domain. She could ask Sol to check on the state of the crops when he went.

Sophia and Marie were very worried when they heard Amelia would also be going to the Beltz Empire. However, compared to last time, when she had been sent there by accident, this journey should be much safer.

Also, this time, she would be able to travel to the empire with transportation magic. If things seemed dangerous, they would be able to return at once.

That seemed to bring the two of them some relief, even if they did still look a bit worried.



Back in her room, Amelia quickly began preparing for the trip.

She would be heading to the empire on official business, just as she had when she'd gone to Janaki, but her aim this time was simply to check how the magical tools were operating and to investigate the cause of the malfunction. Rather than going as a fiancée of royalty, she would be going as a researcher.

Since she was still a student at the academy, there should be no problem with her going in her uniform. And since Sarge was going as a researcher as well, his clothes wouldn't have to be very formal. Only Julius was going as a member of the royal family, so he would be in formal attire.

After finishing with their preparations, they went to receive the king's leave to visit the empire.

Marie looked a bit anxious as she saw off her soon-to-be husband. However, Sophia had convinced her that holding down the fort was an important duty, so Marie seemed more determined than she had been.

Sophia herself was going to give birth soon, around the time that they were planning to return to the kingdom. Since there was a possibility she could go into labor early, they decided to leave the magical tool with Est, who had completed it after reading Sarge's materials.

Sarge had also examined the tool Est had created and found that it was in perfect order.

"He really is amazing, Est is."

Seeing the completed tool, Sarge had seemed satisfied.

Among the four brothers, Est and Sarge were the best at making minute, painstaking adjustments to magic. They entrusted the tool to Est and asked him to put it on Sophia's baby if she were to give birth early.

Then the time came for them to depart for the Beltz Empire. Due to the number of people going, it seemed both Julius and Sarge were going to use transportation magic. Unlike Alexis, who had very powerful magic, the two princes would have difficulty moving everyone to the empire at once. A magic circle had been drawn to amplify their power, so by standing on top of that when they cast their magic, they would be able to transport everyone to the empire.

"Be careful. Kaid, Liliane. I'm counting on you to look after those three," said Alexis. The two knights nodded, and then Julius and Sarge cast their transportation magic.

Amelia closed her eyes on reflex as she felt a soft, floating sensation—Sarge supported her back.

In an instant, the air surrounding her changed.

She felt it heat up, and she unconsciously took a deep breath.

It was true that the Beltz Empire was the complete opposite of Bedeiht, which was situated in the northernmost part of the continent. Even so, she felt it was unusual that there would be such a difference in temperature between two nations on this continent, which wasn't very large.

It feels even hotter here than it did in that town near the border.

Amelia let out a deep sigh as she recalled the town she'd been in before.

Was there really such a big difference in temperature between the two locations, which were both part of the empire?

"Are you okay, Amelia?" Sarge asked in a worried tone.

Amelia looked up at him with a start. "Yes, I'm fine," she responded, taking a look at her surroundings.

The circle for the transportation magic had been drawn inside a building in a corner of the imperial capital. Unsurprisingly, it hadn't been set up in the imperial castle.

The bare room was devoid of people, and its seemingly plain door was locked by magic. That must have been Alexis's doing. No imperial would be able to open a door locked by magic, so even if their relations with the empire turned hostile again, it would be impossible for the imperials to infiltrate the kingdom through this room.

Apparently, even though the goal of their visits was to provide support to the empire, there were some people in the empire who felt uneasy about the existence of this magic circle, which could easily allow in people from the kingdom.

The magic circle was at most a way to support the use of magic. It was possible to cast transportation magic even without a circle; whether the magic circle was there or not changed nothing. Rather, Carloyd had granted them permission to use it in order to make things at least a little easier on them, since the kingdom was helping out the empire, after all.

Kaid stood at the front. Behind him was Julius, followed by Sarge, and then Amelia. They exited the room in that order, with Liliane at the very end. Outside of the room was a long hallway lined with several rooms on either side, but there was no sign of anyone around.

After they exited the doors, they were met with the sight of the city streets of the imperial capital. There were many low buildings surrounded by tall exterior walls, which must have served to create shade.

The structure that was visible in the distance must have been the imperial castle. The castle walls were made of sandstone and covered with detailed ornamentation that glittered in the sunlight. The complex designs were reminiscent of magic circles or ancient magic language.

So this is the capital of the Beltz Empire...

When Amelia, Sarge, and Kaid had been transported to the empire by mistake, they had ended up in a place near the steep mountain range along the border. Just as Amelia had felt before, the capital, situated near the center of the empire, was even hotter than that border town.

There were several imperial soldiers guarding the building in which the magic circle had been drawn. Julius called out to them, and one came over to guide the party from Bedeiht to the castle.

The roads that passed through the city must have been well maintained at one point. However, the earth was now dry and cracked, and the roads were falling to ruin. They were also too narrow for a carriage to pass through, so it seemed people mainly got around on foot.

The imperial soldier did say he would prepare a horse for them, but since the castle wasn't very far, they decided to just walk there.

Amelia covered herself with a cloth to shield herself from the sun's harsh rays and walked side by side with Sarge. He was gazing around the city street with deep fascination. Amelia herself almost stopped walking, but Kaid and Julius, who were walking ahead, had stern expressions on their faces, so she reined herself in, realizing now was not the time to sightsee.

At last, the Beltz imperial castle came into view.

Unlike the castles of other countries, it was not tall so much as sprawling. It had looked like an architectural marvel even from afar, but seeing it up close allowed Amelia to take in the intricately detailed engravings, and she couldn't help but be captivated. However, the area that must have once been a garden was filled with sand, and the fountain was also completely dried up.

Sarge stopped in his tracks and stared at the garden, but Julius urged him to keep walking.

Inside the castle, Emperor Carloyd greeted their group.

This man is the Beltz Empire's...

Amelia stole a glance at Carloyd as he and Julius exchanged a greeting.

He had incredibly intense eyes. Perhaps because his own father, the previous emperor, had locked him away, Carloyd seemed to have fair skin for someone from the empire.

However, even having been imprisoned, he had never once wavered in his will, and he had come this far despite having few allies. His appearance alone gave a sense of his readiness to carry the empire on his back.

Amelia had heard that the emperor was twenty-eight years old.

Carloyd exchanged a greeting with Sarge and thanked him for

coming all the way to the empire. When Amelia introduced herself next, Carloyd looked at her in surprise.

“So you are the one Alois attempted to abduct.” Carloyd apologized to Amelia for Alois’s actions. “Thank you for forgiving Alois and permitting him to return to the empire.”

Carloyd and Alois were not actually blood relations. Alois’s mother was the child of a princess of Bedeiht and the imperial knight who had saved her. Nevertheless, Carloyd still seemed to care for the man who had been raised with him as his cousin.

Now, Alois and his cousin Lyriann were acting as Carloyd’s aides.

Alois’s grandmother, the sister of the king of Bedeiht, had been kidnapped by the emperor of two generations past.

Which means Alois is related to Sarge and the others by blood.

However, the emperor at the time had fed lies to Alois’s mother, telling her that the princess had abandoned her, and so she had hated the mother she thought had left her behind.

She had passed that hatred down to her son, Alois. He had then brainwashed Princess Chloe, who was to marry into the Bedeiht royal family, in an attempt to manipulate her into doing his bidding.

His plan was to strengthen the military and invade the other side of the continent in search of land that wasn’t desertified. That plot had been foiled by Sarge and Kaid, who had become involved by chance, but no matter how much they had tried to persuade Alois, his hatred towards his grandmother could not be quelled.

The only one who was able to erase that hatred at last was Alois’s cousin, Lyriann.

Lyriann was the daughter of Alois’s aunt, the other daughter of the abducted princess and the imperial knight, whom they’d had after escaping to Janaki.

Lyriann was a beautiful woman with golden hair, which was unusual for Janaki. She apparently very much resembled her grandmother.

After Alois listened to Lyriann’s account and learned that his grandmother had not abandoned his mother, and that she had in fact tried to save her many times over, until one day she never returned from her latest trip over the precipitous mountains, he finally believed that he and his mother had been deceived by the emperor.

He even apologized to Princess Chloe and me...

Amelia and Chloe, both victims of Alois, had given their approval for him to return to the Beltz Empire and become Carloyd’s aide after he promised he would atone for his crime.

Evidently, Carloyd felt very much indebted to them for that.

Nowadays, Alois was visiting each region of the empire, carrying out various negotiations and inspections at Carloyd’s behest, so he was

not often at the castle.

In his place, his cousin Lyriann was by Carloyd's side.

She was a very pretty woman with golden hair similar to Sarge's. Just like Alois, she had only a meager amount of magic power—not enough to be able to use elemental magic, but she had powers that were said to be similar to her grandmother's, such as influencing other people's thoughts and redirecting their attention.

Lyriann had apparently used that power in the Kingdom of Janaki to prevent people from noticing her appearance, which was conspicuous there.

Since Alois had committed a crime, he currently wore a magic-sealing bracelet. Lyriann, however, could use her power at will. Someone as compassionate as her was not likely to use that power carelessly. Moreover, it wouldn't have worked on those with more powerful magic than hers.

However, in a place like the Beltz Empire, where there were almost no mages, Carloyd considered her power a secret weapon.

Like Alois, Lyriann was related by blood to the royal family of Bedeiht.

While Alexis had been frequently visiting the Beltz Empire to support Carloyd, he was also keeping a quiet watch on Lyriann to make sure no one was exploiting her power.

Although their party had traveled to the empire using magic and thus were not tired from the journey, the sudden change in temperature would take a toll on their bodies, so Carloyd had prepared some rooms for them within the castle.

First they would rest there, and then tomorrow they would get to work on their primary objective of fixing the magical tools.

Chapter 2: The Solitary Emperor

The room that had been prepared for Amelia was right next to Sarge's.

Carloyd apologized for the scarcity of guards in the castle, but since both Sarge and Julius could put up magic barriers, that wasn't so much of a problem. As a precaution, Liliane was placed in the same room as Amelia, who herself felt she wouldn't have been able to relax if she were alone.

Amelia quickly put away her belongings and surveyed the inside of the room. It was spacious but much simpler than she had been expecting, with a small window.

I wonder if that's because a big window would let in too much sun and heat up the room.

Needless to say, differences in climate really did have a significant effect on lifestyle.

Feeling intrigued by her surroundings, Amelia spent her time taking in her room and gazing out the small window. Suddenly, a knock came at the door. Liliane answered it.

"Lady Amelia, it's Prince Sarge."

Amelia turned around at Liliane's voice. It seemed Sarge had come to visit her in her room.

"Amelia, are you doing well?" he asked with gentle concern.

Amelia nodded with a smile. "Yes, of course. Though I'm a bit surprised at how much hotter it is here, even on the same continent."

"Me too. In fact, I think the difference in temperature is a bit *too* great. I'd like to look into that more too if we have time," Sarge said in agreement. He took a look around Amelia's room. "I'll put a magic barrier around your room too, just in case. And allow me to adjust the temperature to make it more comfortable."

He then cast his magic, with neither incantation nor magic circle. The effect was immediate: the room grew cooler.

"...That's amazing," Amelia couldn't help but mutter.

Sarge, meanwhile, was looking at the palm of his hand with a strange expression on his face.

"Sarge?"

"The amount of power I use up here is completely different than in Bedeiht. That was true last time we were here too. I know I used a lot of magic at the time, but doing so consumed more energy than I'd

expected.”

Just as Sarge said, the last time they had been in the empire, he had used up too much of his magic and collapsed. Although he had used various types of magic, it wasn't like him to use so much that he would collapse in an enemy nation.

It would be comprehensible if, for some reason, using magic in the empire consumed more power.

“Then maybe the magic stones in the tools are also...”

“They're probably the source of the issue. In any case, we'll run some experiments tomorrow.”

“...Yes, we will.”

Even granting that a mountain range separated the empire from the rest of the continent, the difference in climate was much too extreme. There must have been some explanation for that.

Amelia had heard that while the nations on the other side of the mountains were suffering from the cold, the Beltz Empire was suffering from desertification. And when she had actually found herself in that town close to the border, she had been surprised at just how hot it was.

But now that she was in the imperial capital, with its even more intense heat, she couldn't help but feel that there was something unnatural about this difference in temperature.

Amelia gazed out at the imperial capital's cityscape from her window.

Just what in the world was going on in this empire?

The heat did not dissipate even after the sun set, and it felt as if the heat of the afternoon was still trapped inside the building.

Since they had come for research purposes, even when evening came, they did not all dine together; instead, their dinners were brought to their individual rooms.

The one who brought Amelia and Liliane their meals was Alois's cousin, Lyriann. Amelia had met her once before, when she had come to stay in Bedeiht in order to reason with Alois. However, this was the first time Amelia would be having a conversation with her face-to-face.

Just like Carloyd had, the first thing Lyriann did was apologize for Alois.

The reason Alois used to hate his grandmother was that he had thought she had abandoned his mother in the empire and run off with the imperial knight.

Alois's mother had led a very difficult life here in the Beltz Empire. Taking that into consideration, Amelia couldn't help but understand why he had been out for revenge.

“Please, you needn't apologize anymore. The one truly in the

wrong was the emperor who abducted the princess,” said Amelia.

Her words seemed to reassure Lyriann.

“Thank you for your kind words. It brings me peace of mind to hear you say that.”

Lyriann’s mother was still alive, and after the incident, she had gone to live in Bedeiht. As for Lyriann, she had decided to live in the Beltz Empire, wanting to support her cousin Alois.

“At any rate... This room is quite cool, isn’t it? Is this the work of magic?” Lyriann spoke with surprise.

Amelia nodded at her question and said, “Yes, it’s the work of Sarge’s light magic.”

“So this is light magic...”

Lyriann’s mother had heard much from her own mother, the princess, about her homeland and light magic. Those stories were then passed down to Lyriann, the princess’s granddaughter, and she in turn had spent her life worrying over her aunt, who had been left behind in the Beltz Empire.

It must have been Lyriann’s gentle heart that had gotten Alois back on the right path.

“If you should need anything, I am at your service.”

“Thank you. And thank you for the meal as well.”

Lyriann’s gentle consideration eased Amelia’s nerves.

Today they would rest in their rooms, with the plan being that tomorrow they would get to work experimenting with the magical tool.

Having discussed with Alexis in advance, Carloyd had not made Sarge and Amelia’s names public. Instead, he had apparently just said that the ones visiting the Beltz Empire from Bedeiht were Third Prince Julius and two researchers involved in the magical tool. That way, Amelia and Sarge could concentrate on their research.

However, since the two of them had created enchanted water, magical growth-promoting fertilizer, and several magical tools, their names were likely well known abroad, meaning some people must have realized who they were.

Therefore, some level of caution would be required nonetheless.

Being warned so by Kaid and Liliane, Amelia braced herself to not let her guard down too much.

The next morning, everyone gathered in Julius’s room, where he outlined several points of caution as well as their plans from here on out. Then, he made Amelia and Sarge promise that they would always have either Kaid or Liliane with them and would never go off on their own. He seemed especially concerned that Sarge would become so absorbed in his research that he would even forget he was in the Beltz Empire.

“Since we’ve never had friendly relations with the empire, there’s no treaty regarding magic use here. However, barring any unavoidable situations, the use of offensive magic is prohibited. Though, since the only people among us who can use offensive magic are Kaid and Liliane, that should be no issue.”

“Understood.”

“Yes, sir.”

Kaid and Liliane both nodded at Julius’s words.

The one who was essential to their operation, Sarge, already looked like his head was filled with thoughts of research, and he didn’t seem to have been listening to Julius’s words of warning.

“I’ll make sure I am always by his side, Julius.”

When Amelia told Julius that, he nodded, looking reassured.

“Thanks, Amelia. Sarge, don’t give her too much trouble.”

“...I won’t.”

Julius cast an exasperated glance at Sarge, who had ignored everything else being said and had only given a response when he’d heard Amelia’s name.

“You really are hopeless, aren’t you?”

The way Julius said those words was very kind and expressed how much he cared about his younger brother.

“Anyway, Amelia, Kaid, and I should be fine, but if anyone sees Sarge and Liliane, they’ll know you’re foreigners right away. So be careful.”

Most people in the empire had black hair, with brown or red hair also seen sporadically. However, there was no one with the light-colored hair that Sarge and Liliane had. Care certainly needed to be taken.

Liliane had covered her head with a cloth to shield herself from the sun, as most women in this land did, but Sarge had not.

The nobles of the empire had been informed that researchers from Bedeiht would be visiting, but in order not to get caught up in any unnecessary trouble, they wanted to be as cautious of their surroundings as possible.

Thus, they decided to first test out the magical tool in an area near the capital that had once been farmland.

They inserted a magic stone they’d brought from Bedeiht into one of the magical tools and used it to summon rain.

The rain-producing magical tool was in the shape of a bracelet, so the user could wear it on their arm to activate the magic. The wearer had to channel a small amount of magic through the bracelet, but since no one in the empire could use magic, an additional magic stone was embedded in the tool to activate it.

They had created another prototype that was larger in size, but

the magic stone to activate it would have had to be large as well, which would have reduced its overall efficiency. And so, for the added ease of handling, they had settled on this shape.

The magic stone could be easily removed and so could be exchanged with another when consumed. A gemstone acted as the tool's core, and if magic was poured into it after it was depleted, it could once again be used as a magic stone.

Taking into consideration the Beltz Empire's economic conditions, the two of them had run several experiments in order to develop the most cost-effective tool they could. Even Amelia felt irritated that they had now been accused of forcing the empire to buy faulty magic stones in order to gain undeserved profits.

But...

As she watched the results of the experiments unfold, Amelia wrung her hands tightly together without realizing she was doing so. Their expectation was that the tool would make it rain over all the land within eyesight for about an hour.

However, although the tool activated and worked well at first, the rain quickly weakened in force and then stopped. Sarge immediately checked the magical tool, and, seeing that there was nothing wrong with it, concluded that the cause indeed had to be that the magic stone was being consumed too quickly.

He continued experimenting, switching out the magic stones over and over.

Watching Sarge wordlessly repeat the experiments, Julius and the others seemed unsure of what to do.

Amelia was collecting the used-up magic stones and writing detailed data regarding the types of stones and the amount of rainfall that each produced.

"Sarge, it seems the performance of the magic stones has dropped by thirty percent," Amelia reported, comparing the current data to what she had collected from the experiments they'd run at the academy before coming to the empire.

"How many sets of the same magic stone are left?"

"I've prepared five sets, so there are four remaining. Shall I make some magic stones here so we can try those out?"

"Yes, I think that's a good idea. Brother, could you help?"

"...Got it."

Julius, who had been watching the two in a slight daze, returned to his senses and nodded.

Thus, they recharged the used-up magic stones, which Sarge then tried to use in the magical tool. The magic stones they had just created on the spot performed perfectly, exactly as they had when used in Bedeiht.

“So there’s no doubt, the magic stones really are the source of the problem. But it’s not just the stones that we sold to Bedeiht; the ones we brought with us also showed decreased performance... It seems like something about the land itself is causing this.” Sarge spoke as if to himself. Then he looked at Julius and said, “Brother, can you use watering magic similar to Amelia’s?”

“Oh, yeah. I can.”

“Try using it a few times and tell me if you feel any difference from when you use it in Bedeiht.”

“All right.”

Without even asking what Sarge’s plan was, Julius complied with his request and cast watering magic several times.

“So?”

“Right, I feel like I used up more magic power than I would have at home. What does this mean?”

“I think it’ll be clearer if we do something on a larger scale.”

Saying that, Sarge crouched down and placed a hand on the dry earth.

“No, you can’t!”

Guessing his intentions, Amelia frantically tried to stop him, but Sarge went ahead and poured magic into the desertified earth. The area that had been rained on instantly turned into soft soil. Transforming that large area of soil would have consumed a considerable amount of magic even in Bedeiht. Amelia hurriedly reached her arms out to prop him up.

It looked like he really had used up a lot of his magic, and if Amelia hadn’t shot her hands out as quickly as she had, he would likely have collapsed on the spot. Despite his exhaustion, Sarge, leaning against Amelia, stared fixedly at the palm of his hand as if trying to ascertain how much magic he had consumed.

“You’re right, thirty percent... No, with large-scale magic such as that, maybe it’s closer to forty percent.”

“You...”

Julius was about to scold him in exasperation, but Amelia did so first, still grasping Sarge’s hand.

“Please, don’t push yourself too much. If something were to happen to you, I...”

Her emotions got the better of her, and she couldn’t stop the tears from welling up in her eyes. Seeing that, Sarge became very unsettled and clumsily stroked Amelia’s back.

“I’m sorry. Against my better judgment, I acted rashly just to get an answer. I hope you can forgive me.”

When he made that entreaty of her, it was Amelia’s turn to become flustered.

“My apologies—I said something impertinent,” she said.

“No, you did nothing wrong. I even promised you before that I would be careful, so I’m in the wrong for neglecting to do that.”

Amelia remembered that the last time this sort of thing happened, they had also been in the Beltz Empire.

Thinking about it, Sarge had also collapsed the previous time because of this phenomenon that resulted in people consuming more magic than normal. That had caused Amelia worry at that time as well, and Sarge had promised her then that he wouldn’t push himself too hard anymore.

Sarge’s true nature, however, was that of a researcher.

There were sure to be many more times when, faced with mysterious cases like this, he would get carried away by his intellectual curiosity. Amelia was going to spend her life with Sarge, so she resolved to be more prepared for those instances.

Then she couldn’t stop herself from saying, “I’m probably just repeating the same thing. But please, don’t start disliking me.”

Sarge’s eyes opened wide with shock at her words.

“That would be impossible. You don’t need to worry about that. I actually think I’m the one who should be careful not to make you fed up with me.”

As she held him, Amelia felt elated that there were so many people who cherished her and cared about her feelings.

Ah...

Suddenly, she remembered the two of them were not alone and raised her head to see Julius, Kaid, and Liliane watching over them with gentle expressions, as if they were witnessing a heartwarming scene.

As soon as Amelia saw that, she felt unbearably embarrassed.

“Amelia, I don’t think Sarge will be able to change his ways that easily, but don’t give up on him,” said Julius.

Amelia responded with a hasty denial. “I-I would never!” Sarge was the only person Amelia wished to spend the rest of her life with.

“Well, let’s stop here for today. Though, what should we do about this soil?”

With a troubled look on his face, Julius surveyed the area that had been turned into soft, quality soil, then said, “It should return to normal after some time passes, but I don’t think it’s a good idea to let people see soil that has been altered instantly with magic.” Not wanting Sarge and Amelia’s presence in the empire to be made public, he pondered what to do.

“Okay, I’ll return it to how it was,” said Sarge, dispelling the magic he had cast and returning the land to its previous state.

“Again with you...”

Julius looked appalled as his brother, who had just expressed remorse for his previous actions, once again used magic without a second thought. But then the third prince seemed to realize that there was no other real option in this situation.

“Anyway, that’s it for today. Stay in your room and rest. I’ll have Kaid stand watch.”

This time, Sarge nodded obediently, then accepted the data Amelia had recorded from their experiments.

“Thanks, Amelia. You’ve helped a lot.”

“Oh, it was my pleasure.”

Tomorrow they would be running the same types of experiments, so she resolved to take even more detailed data in order to compare them.

Their party then returned to the imperial castle, where they all repose in their assigned rooms.

They had been running their experiments all day in the hot sun, so it was a relief to be back in her cool room. Liliane brought her some tea unique to the empire. Amelia had been feeling a bit dizzy from the heat, so the refreshing tea was perfect to cool her down.

“Nevertheless, I was surprised,” Liliane said, tilting her head. “You really understand what Prince Sarge wants without him having to tell you, Lady Amelia.”

In response to Liliane’s words of admiration, Amelia gave a vague laugh and responded, “That’s because I’ve done similar things before.”

Amelia had spent many years collecting data on the crop growth and harvests in her family’s domain without anyone ever asking her to.

It was thanks to Sarge, who had deemed that experience essential, that Amelia could be the person she was now. She herself had thought she’d been doing something worthless, so she really was glad that the day had come that someone considered it useful.

Amelia tried to jump right into reorganizing her data, but Liliane told her to rest, and she obeyed her without protest. The two of them also ate their dinner in the room.

Afternoons in the Beltz Empire were long, and even by the time that darkness would already have fallen in Bedeiht, it was still somewhat bright. As Amelia looked out her window, she tried to think of the reason for the increased consumption of magic power in this empire.

There shouldn’t be a single mage in this country. But for some reason, I feel there’s magic in the air here...

Moreover, she felt it more strongly in the capital than the castle.

She wanted to ask Sarge about it; however, it was said that in general, those with weaker magic power were more sensitive to

others' magic. Someone with magic as powerful as Sarge's probably wouldn't be able to sense a subtle change.

Besides, there shouldn't be any mages in this country anymore.

She closed her eyes, contemplating deeply, but she couldn't perceive anything more.

The sun went down, submerging Amelia's surroundings in darkness.

Amelia had dozed off, thinking about the data she had recorded that day, when suddenly she sensed Liliane move. Amelia was about to call out to her when she realized the knight was wearing a very tense expression.

Something must have happened.

Amelia stifled her breathing and lay stock-still in her bed.

"It's all right," Liliane said in a gentle voice when she noticed that Amelia was awake. "This room is securely protected by Prince Sarge's barrier magic."

Hearing that made Amelia's body relax with relief.

"...What happened?" she asked.

"I believe someone was trying to trespass into your room, Lady Amelia."

"What about Sarge?"

She became concerned for him and promptly tried to leave the room, but Liliane stopped her.

"Lady Amelia, it's too dangerous to go outside. Kaid and Prince Julius are both with Prince Sarge."

That finally calmed Amelia down. She had been about to leave the safety of this room, which was protected by a barrier.

"I'm sorry, I lost my head for a moment," she said, slowly moving away from the door.

But still...

She had accepted that this journey might be dangerous, but she hadn't thought they would actually be attacked.

We're guests of Emperor Carloyd, and we're even in the imperial castle...

This attack was proof that his position as emperor was not yet secure.

Moreover, unlike Sarge and Amelia, who had come here as researchers, Julius had not concealed who he was. Therefore, the attacker must have been aware that they had come from Bedeiht.

Could the assailant be someone who doesn't want Emperor Carloyd to gain support as a result of the rain-producing magical tool being fixed? But without any rainfall, this country would still be in trouble.

She let out a sigh, then immediately heard a familiar voice call her name.

“Amelia.”

She was softly embraced from behind.

She hadn't noticed the door opening, so he must have come here using teleportation magic.

“Sarge?”

Just when Amelia had been feeling anxious, she found herself embraced by the person she most wanted to see, and she couldn't stop herself from turning around and nestling in close in his arms.

Perhaps Sarge had also tried to rush to Amelia's room but Kaid had stopped him. But wanting to check that she was all right, he had used magic to come see her, even though he was meant to be recovering from overusing it earlier.

“I'm glad you're okay,” Sarge said, looking relieved. Amelia's worries had also been alleviated seeing he was well.

“Julius...”

“My brother wasn't attacked, naturally. It seems there's someone here who doesn't want the magical tools to work right.” Sarge looked out the window, still holding Amelia in his arms, and murmured, “If we leave things be, then the Beltz Empire's territory could turn uninhabitable. This isn't the time for family to be fighting amongst themselves.”

His words made Amelia realize that the assailant must have been an underling of Carloyd's brothers. The princes of Bedeiht were all on good terms with one another. That must have been why Sarge lamented the imperial family's infighting.

“In any case, we need to determine the cause of the magic stones' malfunction and get the tool working right. I'm sure we'll run into more hindrances from here on, but I will protect you, Amelia.”

With those words, he tightened his embrace around Amelia. Her unease melted away at his words and the warmth he gave her.

Sarge had been the one who'd saved her from a solitary existence of trusting no one after what Reese had done. And it had been he who had saved her when the vengeful Alois had targeted and almost kidnapped her.

That was why she knew that if anything were to happen, he *would* protect her. She could trust him to do that.

And I want to help him too. Though I don't think there's anything I can do...

And yet Sarge had told Amelia he needed her, that he couldn't be without her.

In order to show that she reciprocated those feelings, she wanted to become someone useful to him. Someone who could watch over him, since he was prone to pushing himself, and understand his needs without him having to say anything.

“I’ll strengthen the barrier around your room. I’ll make it so no one with any ill will can even approach this area. So please, both of you rest easy.”

The princes of Bedeiht could use light magic to communicate with individuals not in the vicinity. Apparently, Julius had scolded Sarge for leaving Kaid behind and going off on his own, so Sarge reinforced the barrier around Amelia’s room and then returned to his own.

Sarge’s barrier would protect her. That thought eased her mind, and she was able to fall into a restful sleep.

Julius had evidently reported the attack to Emperor Carloyd.

Carloyd dropped in to see Amelia and the others, who were discussing their plan for that day, and apologized for the day before.

In response to the emperor’s apology for failing to prevent the attack, Julius let him know that no one had been hurt, and that they would keep their magic barriers up for protection, so security was unnecessary.

“There were no signs of a fight with the guards. If the inside of the castle is unsafe, then you need to be careful too,” Julius cautioned.

Carloyd’s expression stiffened.

“Understood. For the time being, I’ll only move among trusted companions.”

Amelia felt a bit sympathetic towards Carloyd, who was unable to let his guard down even within the castle. However, this was his chosen way of life, and his chosen fight.

Afterwards, they conducted experiments outside of the capital as they had yesterday. No harm had actually come to them, so despite the ambush, they could not stop their research. The amount of time they were going to stay in the Beltz Empire was strictly regulated by the king of Bedeiht, and he had told them that he would not extend the length of their stay no matter what.

They could not waste a single day.

Also, just as Sarge and Amelia had predicted, the power of the magic stones dropped by another ten percent.

And the next day, yet another ten percent.

When they used up all five sets of the magic stones, they found that they had lost seventy percent of their capacity. Creating a small amount of rainfall in a confined area was the limit of their power. The magic stones could be reused if they were recharged with magic, which they were also testing out repeatedly.

From their experimenting, they had found that the cause of the tools’ malfunction was the magic stones, and that those magic stones weakened in power as each day passed. However, magic stones were not supposed to deteriorate no matter how much time passed. Even magic stones that had been created decades ago could work without

issue. Nevertheless, the magic stones in the empire quickly lost their power.

The Beltz Empire had purchased a large quantity of stones in order to operate the tool. If it turned out that they had in effect thrown away their money, that would be a significant loss for them.

However, seeing as the magic stones only exhibited this sort of abnormality within the empire, it was obviously not the fault of Bedeiht. In fact, they had selected high-quality magic stones that would ordinarily have lasted for a long period of time.

“...We’ve established the source of the defects. But the reason for it is still unclear,” Sarge muttered as he looked over the data Amelia had handed to him.

Considering that the increased consumption of magic was affecting not only the magic stones but magic cast by people, there had to be some power having a significant effect on the country.

“Our sojourn ends the day after tomorrow, though. We can’t stay longer no matter what, and your summer vacation is ending soon, Amelia. Above all, after finding out about the attack, our brothers and father have said we should consider coming back as early as tomorrow.”

Sarge didn’t immediately respond to Julius, instead sinking into thought. He must have wanted to continue their investigation. However, with not only his brothers but his father the king urging him to return home, he couldn’t very well fail to comply.

“We were planning to stay for one more day. I’d like to at least continue our work until tomorrow. This nation used to have mages in the past. If we could find some documents relating to magic here, I want to take a look at those.”

Julius considered Sarge’s wish for a moment, then said, “I’ll ask Emperor Carloyd. But the last time the Beltz Empire had any mages was a very long time ago. Hopefully those documents you want still exist, but who knows.”

“Also, I think we need to test whether the magic stones are consumed in the same way in each area of the empire,” said Sarge.

Julius nodded. “All right. I can take care of that. I’ve gotten permission from Emperor Carloyd to use transportation magic, so I’ll travel to each region and try out the same watering magic in each area. Amelia, are you okay with staying here tomorrow too?”

“Yes, of course,” Amelia assented.

It had certainly been terrifying to be ambushed, but Sarge’s barrier had protected her from any harm. Tomorrow, she wanted to assist Sarge with finding documents relating to magic.

Thus, they decided to stay until the day after tomorrow, as they had originally planned.

After speaking with Carloyd, they learned that some very old documents remained deep within the castle. Apparently they could not be taken elsewhere, and so, from the morning onward, Sarge stayed in the room where they were being stored.

The reference room was similar to the academy's library, with densely packed shelves lining the walls. Starting from the far end, Sarge looked through the documents in search of what he needed. What he was looking for was evidence that something similar had happened in this empire in the past.

Perhaps there were past cases of magic consuming too much power or of magic stones deteriorating over time. Since he didn't know where anything was, it was a fairly time-consuming task. Amelia was also lending a hand, while Liliane had accompanied them as their guard.

Meanwhile, Julius was testing out his magic in various parts of the empire, as requested by Sarge, who had hypothesized that the closer Julius got to the capital, the more magic energy would be consumed.

Sarge's usual knight, Kaid, was acting as Julius's guard today as he made his way to the different parts of the empire.

"There's quite a lot here, isn't there..." Amelia muttered as she looked at the mountain of reference materials.

About a hundred years had passed since magic was lost in the Beltz Empire, but the documents from that time remained.

"There are also materials concealed by magic, so it has probably been impossible to organize them," Sarge said as he quickly scanned the materials.

Amelia was helping to sort through the old documents when suddenly, she heard a commotion outside the room. There was a frantic pounding on the door. Liliane approached it cautiously.

"Prince Sarge, it appears to be Lady Lyriann."

At Liliane's words, Sarge raised his face from his reading materials.

"I'll lift the barrier temporarily," he said. "You can allow her inside."

"Yes, sir."

Lyriann, escorted into the reference room by Liliane, looked terribly shaken.

She shakily lowered herself into the seat in front of Sarge. Then, in a trembling voice, she said, "Emperor Carloyd has been attacked by an assassin..."

The emperor had been attacked in the imperial castle.

Hearing that shocking news made Sarge put down the documents he was sifting through and stand up.

"He was attacked? What is his condition?"

“He’s been gravely injured. Please... Please, save him,” she pleaded desperately.

Alois was away from the castle on business, so the only one by Carloyd’s side had been a longtime friend and supporter of his.

That very friend had apparently betrayed him.

Witnessing Lyriann’s tearful plea, Amelia rushed over to Sarge’s side.

If the situation was critical, then it was better for Amelia to use her healing magic instead of waiting for Julius to return. Coming to that conclusion, she asked for permission to do so.

“Sarge, I can use healing magic.”

“I’ve received my father’s permission. Let’s hurry.”

He must have used magic to communicate with the king.

Lyriann, who seemed ready to burst into tears at any second, brought the three of them to Carloyd’s room.

“...Urgh.”

The moment they entered the room, Amelia felt faint at the strong scent of blood.

“Amelia,” Sarge said as he quickly propped her upright.

“Thank you.”

Comforted by the warmth on her back, Amelia approached the bed where Carloyd was lying down. As Lyriann looked at her with imploring eyes, Amelia said reassuringly, “Everything is going to be all right. I’ll heal him.”

Carloyd’s face was deathly pale from the blood loss. It seemed he had been stabbed by someone by his side—someone he hadn’t been wary of.

Right now, saving this man’s life was more important than finding the culprit.

“Amelia, here.”

Right when Amelia was about to use her healing magic, Sarge handed her several magic stones.

“You’re going to use up a lot more of your power than usual, especially on a wound this serious. Use these stones to cast your healing magic.”

“Ah, yes. Thank you.”

She accepted one of the magic stones and felt a familiar magic energy flowing through it. Sarge must have created this stone on the spur of the moment. With the aid of the stone, Amelia cast her healing magic.

“...Ngh.”

Once she used enough healing magic to bring him back from the brink of death, she found she had consumed even more power than she’d been expecting. If she hadn’t had this magic stone of Sarge’s

creation, she would have used too much power and probably collapsed.

Sarge was staring at Amelia with concern and asked, "Are you okay?"

"Yes, thanks to your magic stone, I'm fine," she responded, smiling. Sarge looked relieved.

"Thank you for saving Emperor Carloyd. Truly..." Lyriann said through tears. Amelia explained that even though she had healed his wound, it would still take time for him to recover from his blood loss, and that he should rest.

Julius returned in a haste and examined how Carloyd was doing.

"Your healing magic was perfect, Amelia. All we can do now is wait for him to recover."

Amelia breathed a sigh of relief when Julius told her that.

In any case, in order to prevent any intruders from entering while the emperor was recovering, Sarge set up a barrier around his room. Now, no one harboring any malicious intentions towards Carloyd should be able to enter the room.

"Now, then, let's sort out this situation."

Everyone was gathered in Carloyd's room, keeping an eye on his condition as they discussed what to do next. Taking the central role was Julius.

Lyriann and Alois, who had returned after hearing that Carloyd had been attacked, were also in the room. Alois had been away from the capital on Carloyd's orders. The assailant had probably been waiting for the moment Alois was away from Carloyd's side to attack.

"Do you know who the culprit is?" Julius asked.

Lyriann nodded. "The one who attacked the emperor was a close aide who has been with him since he was the crown prince."

He had been by Carloyd's side even when he'd been treated callously by his father, the previous emperor, for opposing him. Apparently, that individual who had been so close to Carloyd had been tempted by his half-brothers to betray him. Carloyd had been cautious of the castle guards per Julius's advice, but the emperor must have never thought he would be betrayed by his close aide.

Although the emperor's wound had been healed with magic, it would still take time before he was able to move. If the emperor remained out of commission, then there was the dreadful possibility his enemies would take the chance to seize control.

After thinking for a moment, Julius spoke to the still-shaken Lyriann. "Before Emperor Carloyd wakes up, I think we should make it clear who the culprit is. Could you help with that?"

"You want *my* help?"

"I do. At this rate, there's a possibility that the emperor's half-

brothers will take control of the castle under the pretext of finding the culprit. That will probably affect how we're treated here."

There was the danger that they would be imprisoned in the castle until the assassin was brought to light. It would be better for them to be driven out of the country.

"The researchers involved in creating the magical tool... If the brothers' underlings really were behind the attack on Sarge and Amelia's rooms, then while Emperor Carloyd is confined to his bed, it'll be dangerous for us to remain here in the empire. Moreover, I want to identify the true culprit for Emperor Carloyd's safety as well."

Julius wanted Lyriann to use her power of both diverting and attracting people's attention. Having understood that, Lyriann had looked flustered. Yet, hearing that this was in order to protect Carloyd, she looked determined to do so.

"...Understood. This will be my first time using my power like this, so I don't know if I'll be able to do it well. But if it's to protect His Majesty, then I will try."

Alois drew in close to Lyriann, looking at her with concern. Lyriann gave him a brave smile.

"I appreciate it. I promise I'll protect Emperor Carloyd," said Julius. He then asked Lyriann and Alois to assemble the heads of the imperial aristocracy.

A disturbance had spread among the nobles when they received the news that an assassin had attacked the emperor.

Carloyd's two younger half-brothers looked displeased. They had wanted to take this opportunity to seize the castle, but Lyriann and Alois had acted first.

The older brother was named Igis, the younger Sosey.

They were born of different mothers, both favored concubines of the previous emperor. In addition to the empress, the previous emperor had apparently had no fewer than three concubines.

Neither of the brothers looked much like Carloyd. They both appeared to have very healthy physiques. It was as if these two alone were living in luxury in this country that was suffering a food shortage.

"Now, then, shall I start by introducing myself? My name is Julius, the third prince of the Kingdom of Bedeiht. Emperor Carloyd was immediately healed with magic, so his life is not in danger. He should awake soon."

As soon as Julius finished speaking, a commotion broke out among the assembled nobles. Most of them seemed relieved to hear that Carloyd was all right.

The reason everyone was listening quietly to Julius, a royal of a foreign country, was that Lyriann was using her power to direct their

attention to his words. In the past, Lyriann had only ever used her power to keep herself from standing out, but this time, she had resolved that it was necessary to manipulate the crowd in order to protect Carloyd during this critical situation.

“The culprit has already been apprehended. He seems to have been the emperor’s close aide.”

The crowd of nobles once again grew noisy at his explanation.

“So our brother was betrayed by his own confidant. That is what you’re saying, isn’t it?” someone asked, a faint smile on his face. It was the younger of Carloyd’s brothers, Sosey.

Julius turned his gaze to him and said, “Just looking at the facts, that seems to be correct. However, there’s more to it than that. Let’s recreate the scene now.”

At a look from Julius, Sarge stepped forward.

As Amelia had witnessed once before, Sarge’s reenactment magic was not a simple projection of an image but rather a three-dimensional scene. Before everyone’s eyes emerged the figures of Sosey and the emperor’s close aide.

Nobles throughout the crowd raised cries of shock at the projection, which really looked to be right there in front of them.

The Sosey who appeared before them tempted Carloyd’s attendant with clever words, promising him status and riches when he succeeded.

“This isn’t true. This is all deception. How dare you pull a trick like this in an attempt to frame me!” Sosey shouted.

However, there seemed to be others present whom he had promised similar things in the past. Their suspicious gazes converged on him.

Furthermore, in order to prove the validity of his recreation magic, Sarge recreated a scene which no foreigner could have known about.

There were those in the imperial nobility who could not agree with Carloyd’s policy of relying on foreign aid. However, even among that faction, there were also many who understood this empire’s current situation and the fact that this was not a time to be fighting among themselves.

Even power struggles depended upon the empire’s continued survival.

No matter what their views may have been, Carloyd was still a necessity.

Sosey, who had rashly tried to eliminate him, would surely be arrested as the perpetrator of a grave crime. Even without recreation magic, it was highly likely that someone capable of such a heedless act had left behind some sort of evidence.

“Let’s make this the end of our meddling in a foreign country’s affairs,” Julius said quietly.

He entrusted the room to Carloyd’s retainers and, with Sarge in tow, made his exit. Amelia, who had been watching from the back, followed after them, with Liliane guarding her.

Establishing order in this empire was Carloyd’s responsibility. Once he recovered, he would be the one to decide how to deal with Sosey.

Amelia and the others returned to Carloyd’s room to check on his condition. He was still asleep, but his color had improved significantly. He was sure to awaken soon.

“We’ll need to return home tomorrow, as planned,” Julius told Lyriann, who looked anxious. He continued, “But my brother Alec has said he will be coming in our place.”

Hearing that, both Lyriann and Alois looked reassured.

Although it might have seemed strange to say that Alexis, the crown prince, could move about more freely than Third Prince Julius and Fourth Prince Sarge, everyone knew he could.

Even without the assistance of a magic circle, he could return to Bedeiht on his own, and his offensive magic was so powerful that he didn’t need a guard. They’d had only one cause for concern: that he would be away from Sophia, who would be giving birth soon.

However, apparently Sophia had safely given birth to their firstborn child a bit earlier than expected. Julius, who had received that information by way of magic communication, reported the news with a smile.

“Both mother and child are healthy, and the couple is also very pleased with the magical tool Est made.”

“Is that so? I’m so glad to hear that,” responded Amelia.

She wished she could have given the gift and congratulated them in person, but at least Alexis had been able to remain by Sophia’s side while the others were in the Beltz Empire. That must have brought Sophia much more peace of mind.

Amelia decided to go see Sophia the moment she returned home.

Even Lyriann and Alois, who had appeared to be brooding, offered their congratulations when they heard the news of the birth of Alexis’s child. The two of them had grown close to Alexis, since he had been visiting the empire so often.

With the exceptions of Lyriann and Alois, who stayed behind in Carloyd’s bedroom, the party reconvened in a separate room to discuss what they were going to do until tomorrow morning.

“All right, about the plan from here on...”

“Julius, please visit the towns you haven’t been to yet. We need that data no matter what it takes.”

“...All right. There are only a few left, so I’ll do that.”

Julius was acting in accordance with Sarge’s urgent request that he try using his magic in each region of the empire to test whether he expended more magical energy than expected. Although Julius was worried about leaving Sarge and Amelia behind in the castle, he had no choice but to agree after being told it was essential data.

“And what will you do while I’m gone?”

“I’ll keep analyzing those magic documents until the moment we have to leave.”

“Okay. In that case, Amelia, it would be great if you could watch over Carloyd’s condition.”

“...Yes, understood.”

Amelia had planned on helping Sarge, but Carloyd had not yet awakened. Certainly, it was a good idea to watch over him for a bit longer.

“Okay, then—Liliane, stay by Amelia. Kaid, go with my brother.”

“What about you?”

Julius seemed concerned about Sarge being on his own, but Sarge told him that wasn’t a problem, since he could put up a barrier. Hearing that, Julius seemed convinced his younger brother would be fine. Thus, they all went their separate ways.

Amelia would be standing by in Carloyd’s room with Liliane, keeping an eye on his condition.

Lyriann and Alois would be busy from now on working with Carloyd’s aides to get the current situation in hand. That was why Amelia, who could use healing magic, plus Liliane as her guard, would stay by the emperor’s side while his condition was still unstable.

When Lyriann and Alois bowed repeatedly to Amelia, asking her to take care of Carloyd, she nodded earnestly. The emperor needed to fully recover for the sake of peace on this continent.

“Amelia, take these.”

Before heading to the reference room, Sarge handed Amelia a large number of magic stones. They were all the stones that had been consumed during the experiments. Sarge had imbued them with magic again for Amelia.

“...Thank you.”

Amelia grasped them carefully in her hands.

She would be stationed apart from him, but with these stones, she felt as if she were enveloped in Sarge’s magic, and she was able to enjoy a sense of security.

Still grasping the magic stones Sarge had given her, Amelia monitored Carloyd’s condition and intermittently cast recovery magic on him. Before she knew it, the sun had set, and her surroundings had darkened.

Julius would be returning tomorrow morning, and then they would be heading straight back to Bedeiht. Sarge was likely to stay in the reference room until morning.

Although she was worried about Sarge, Amelia also had her own obligations. She had to fulfill her duty. With that thought in mind, Amelia approached Carloyd's bed in order to check on him.

Yes, he seems to be doing all right.

While she checked his complexion and wavered on whether she should use more recovery magic just in case, Carloyd let out a faint sound and opened his eyes.

"You are..."

"I'm Amelia, from the Kingdom of Bedeiht," Amelia said, naming herself so as not to alarm him. "I'm glad to see you're awake." She gave him a smile in order to ease any confusion he might still be feeling.

"I used healing magic to help you recover, but you still need to regain your strength. Please continue resting."

For several moments, Carloyd looked to be deep in thought, as if trying to understand the situation.

"Ah, I see. So Rohi betrayed me," he muttered. Then, with a shaky hand, he grasped at his own chest. Evidently, the close aide who had betrayed him was named Rohi. "If I can't even trust Rohi, then who in the world *can* I trust...?"

Amelia's heart ached at his sorrowful voice.

From an outsider's perspective, Rohi was a foolish and greedy man who had become so fixated on his immediate desires that he had betrayed the emperor he'd known for so long. However, Carloyd had trusted him. Those eyes that had expressed such fierce determination when Amelia first met Carloyd were now clouded.

Carloyd, whose hope of somehow changing this empire had led him to oppose even his own father, had until now only been looking ahead.

That was exactly why he trusted in his associates to take care of things behind the scenes.

However, a traitor had emerged from among those associates. Carloyd's path forward would no longer be a straightforward road free of doubts. Feeling a bit pained at that thought, Amelia wanted to try to comfort him in some way.

"Sometimes, you can be betrayed through no fault of your own."

Carloyd raised his face in surprise. Amelia smiled at him.

"My former fiancé spread awful rumors about me at school before I even enrolled, with the result that my classmates ostracized me. He had found someone else he liked. I didn't even know that he had found a girlfriend, and, without my realizing it, I had been painted as

the villainess who was out to prevent them from being together.”

Her story was trivial compared to that of Carloyd, who had just been the target of an assassination. But what she wanted to convey was that, after being betrayed in a despicable way, there was no need to be held back by it forever.

“My current fiancé, he saved me. There are undoubtedly others who will become your allies, so...”

“Oh, of course. You are Prince Sarge’s fiancée from Bedeiht, are you not?” Carloyd nodded in understanding. Then his expression suddenly softened as he looked at Amelia. “I can sense you two have an unshakable relationship built on trust. I can’t help but envy that sort of relationship.”

Amelia flinched a little as the emperor looked at her with an expression of such painful longing.

“We have been through a lot. But each time we overcome a problem, our love and our bond deepens. There are people who will be your allies no matter what happens, Your Majesty.”

“...You’re right. I suppose I can’t give up yet.”

Despite his words, his expression remained cloudy. Amelia understood why, seeing as he had just been betrayed by someone he had trusted.

At that moment, Amelia had been thinking of Lyriann and Alois, who had been frantic to save Carloyd.

“Lyriann was desperate to save you, Your Majesty. She even used her power, which she’d never used on other people, to find the true culprit.”

Even Alois, when he’d heard that Carloyd had been attacked while he was away from the castle, had apparently gone pale and rushed back to the capital. When she told Carloyd that, his mood seemed to improve a little.

“Is that right? Lyriann and Alois... I’ll have to thank them both.”

“I believe Julius will be giving you a detailed report about the attack by tomorrow morning. For now, please prioritize resting your body.”

Carloyd followed Amelia’s advice without protest.

Liliane, who had been standing behind Amelia, came over to Carloyd’s side.

“I’ll stay here, so please rest a bit, Lady Amelia.”

“I will. Thank you.”

After thanking Liliane, Amelia went to lie down on the large sofa in the corner of the room.

I wonder how Sarge is doing...

Now that Amelia had confidence that Carloyd was going to be fine, she instead started worrying about Sarge, who was poring over

those documents all by himself. She was sure he was devoting himself completely to his work without even taking a break.

“Sarge...”

When she called his name out loud without thinking, she felt herself softly enveloped in a familiar magic.

“Ah!”

Sensing the magic, Liliane came rushing over.

“What...?”

“It’s all right. This is Sarge’s power. I’m going to go see how he’s doing, so please watch over His Majes—”

Before she could finish her sentence, her body was enveloped in a sensation similar to that when she had been transported by magic. She closed her eyes on reflex and then felt herself embraced by Sarge.

“Sarge!”

She’d been worried and wanted to be near him.

Since they both had their separate duties, Amelia had been patient, but the moment she saw his face, she leapt into his arms.

“I’m sorry for transporting you all of a sudden. I felt like I heard you calling for me, so I summoned you here without thinking.”

Amelia shook her head vigorously at his apology.

“Don’t apologize. I’ve also been thinking only of you.”

Still in his arms, she surveyed the room and saw all the documents relating to magic lined up around them. He must have been studying them this whole time.

“I’m sorry for disrupting your work.”

“You’re not disrupting anything,” he said, grasping Amelia’s hands. He stroked the ring on her finger. “More than research, or anything else, you are the most important thing to me, Amelia. So I want you to call for me anytime, whatever the reason. I’ll come running to you no matter what I’m doing.”

Precisely because he didn’t often express himself in words, those words were etched deeply in Amelia’s heart.

“Thank you,” she responded. “You are the only one for me too.”

Nothing could sway Amelia’s love for Sarge.

As soon as she thought that, she remembered Carloyd’s words from earlier.

“His Majesty Emperor Carloyd is awake now. He seems to be in a lot of shock after being betrayed by the aide he trusted...”

“That’s understandable.”

Sympathizing with the emperor’s feelings, Sarge nodded gently. There were very few people who would follow Carloyd as he walked the thorny path of upholding lofty ideals. And he wouldn’t choose the easy path going forward either.

However, no matter how strong a person he was, there were times

when he wanted to rely on someone. There surely must have been times when he wanted support.

“He told me he envied our relationship. But he does have Lyriann and Alois by his side.”

Those two would surely continue to support Carloyd from here on out.

And so, the two of them spent the rest of the night looking over the reference materials. Since they of course could not take anything out of the room with them, they had no choice but to memorize the main points. They immersed themselves in that task until Julius came to get them the next morning.

“I should have known Amelia would be here too.”

“My apologies...”

Amelia apologized for leaving Carloyd’s side, but since the emperor had woken up and his condition was stable, Julius didn’t reprimand her for it.

Amelia and Sarge went together to meet with Carloyd. He was fully conscious, and his physical condition did not seem too bad. He was sure to continue recovering smoothly. Although the color still hadn’t returned to his face, that intense brightness had returned to his eyes.

“I must thank you for the matter with Sosey,” said Carloyd. “That recreation magic certainly is something else.”

“It would have been better if we hadn’t had to use it. Light magic is strictly regulated, but should you ever request it, we will use it to help anytime,” Julius said.

They would leave everything else to Alexis, who would be coming here in their place, while their party would now be returning home.

Alois stayed behind to guard Carloyd. The rest of the party left the castle, accompanied by Lyriann, and went to the building where the magic circle had been drawn.

Although it was daytime, the capital was very quiet. Not many people were around.

According to Lyriann, most people stayed indoors during the afternoon, the hottest time of the day, and were active in the early morning or after sunset.

That makes sense. It must be dangerous to go outside when it’s so hot.

Even with the cloth protecting her head, the rays of the sun beat down upon Amelia mercilessly.

Also...

Amelia suddenly stopped walking and looked around at the city. Sure enough, she thought she could sense magic power. She still couldn’t tell where it was coming from, but there was definitely someplace in this city where magic was detectable.

“Amelia?”

Sarge, seeing that she had stopped, called out to her with concern. She rushed over to him and grabbed hold of the hand he had extended to her.

When they arrived in front of the building where the magic circle was, they parted ways with Lyriann. She was looking at Amelia as if she had something she wanted to say, but then she just bowed her head wordlessly.

“Our brothers are waiting for us. Shall we go?”

Amelia nodded at Julius’s words, then stood on top of the magic circle.

She closed her eyes, bracing herself for the transportation magic.

Chapter 3: For Peace and Problem-Solving

When she opened her eyes, she found she had already arrived at the familiar castle of the Kingdom of Bedeiht.

The air was a bit damp and chilly. It was raining in Bedeiht.

The sound of the rain pounding against the window made Amelia feel keenly that she had returned home.

They hadn't been gone for long, but a lot had happened.

The Beltz Empire's dry air. The strong rays of the sun. And the repeated attempts at making rain fall with the magical tool.

"Amelia."

Hearing her name called in a gentle voice, Amelia turned around. Sarge was reaching a hand out towards her.

"I'm sure you're tired. You should go back to your room for today and rest."

"But..."

She needed to greet the king, and she also wanted to go see Alexis and Sophia. Plus, she had much to do, such as organizing and analyzing the data she had brought back with her.

"We'll take care of reporting to our father, so it's okay if you go rest. You must be tired after having to be involved in all that trouble."

With even Julius telling her the same thing, she realized she really must have looked fairly tired. She brought a hand up to her cheek reflexively.

But of course, she knew she was tired, since so much *had* happened. It would probably be best for her to go get some proper sleep before she caused Sarge any worry.

"Liliane, please get Amelia to go rest."

"Yes, understood."

Seeing that Amelia was hesitating, Sarge gave his directions to Liliane, who acted immediately. And so, Amelia was brought to her room.

"Although transportation magic is instantaneous, it was very hot in the empire, and the large difference in temperature must have exhausted your strength. So, as Prince Sarge said, please take it easy today."

"...But if I'm away from him, he'll—"

Without a doubt, Sarge would get to work analyzing the data they

had brought back with them as soon as he could. There was even the possibility that he would be up all night. That was why she had to be with him.

In response to Amelia's concern, Liliane gently reasoned with her.

"I believe Prince Sarge is about to report the results of his investigation to His Majesty. Prince Julius is going to be there with him, and there's a possibility their discussion will go on for a while..."

Sarge and Julius were probably headed straight to the king and Alexis to report on the situation.

Since Amelia had gone as a researcher this time rather than as part of her royal duties, there was no reason for her to be there with them. She would have to stand by in a separate room until Sarge returned. That was why he, expecting that their report would take a long time, had suggested that Amelia go on ahead and rest.

In that case, she should relax while she could so that when Sarge needed her, she could work at her full capacity. Reconsidering it that way, Amelia decided to do as the others said.

After Liliane left, Amelia changed out of her clothes. Her personal maid came by to brew her favorite tea, and then her pent-up exhaustion hit her all at once.

"Lady Amelia, why don't you go ahead and get some rest now?" the maid suggested gently. Amelia nodded.

"Yes, I think I will. Thank you."

Intending only to take a quick break, Amelia lay down on her bed and closed her eyes. However, it seemed that her body was more tired than she'd thought, and at some point, she fell asleep.

When she awoke, it was already morning. Surprised that she had slept all through the evening and into the next morning, she hurriedly got up to get herself ready. Since the time for breakfast was already over, her maid came to lay out her meal for her in her room.

"Lady Marie has expressed the desire to see you," said the maid.

"Oh yes, of course. Please let her know she can come by," Amelia requested of the maid.

Around the time Amelia finished the breakfast that had been prepared for her, a visitor arrived in her quarters.

At first she thought that Marie had received her message and come to see her, but apparently, the visitor was someone else.

"Lady Amelia, His Highness the Crown Prince is here to see you."

"Alexis...?"

At the maid's words, Amelia quickly welcomed him into her room.

Amelia had assumed he was speaking with the king right now alongside Julius and Sarge. She had heard that he would be going to the Beltz Empire immediately after that to watch over Carloyd's condition.

“Sorry for calling on you when you’ve just woken up. I really wanted to speak with you before leaving,” Alexis said, fixing his gaze on her.

Amelia figured he wanted to ask her about Carloyd, so she waited nervously for his next words.

“I wanted to thank you directly for that magical tool. Est told me you were the one who came up with the idea.”

“Ah...”

Alexis had come to see her in regard to the magical tool that she had suggested might be useful for Sophia and Alexis’s son until he was old enough to control his magic.

While Amelia and the others were in the empire, Sophia had given birth to their firstborn son. As expected, the baby had strong magical power, which was undoubtedly light magic.

Before their party had left for the Beltz Empire, Est had told her that he should be able to complete the tool without issue. Amelia had told him that if the baby was born before she returned home, he should give the completed tool to Sophia. Est had followed through with that.

“I’m sorry for not asking first.”

“No apologies necessary. It’s very useful. It’s brought Sophia some relief as well. Thanks, Amelia. It’s all because of you.”

Amelia had heard that babies born with strong magical power were difficult, since they often cried loudly before learning how to control their magic, but thanks to Amelia’s magical tool, the baby was sleeping well, which was evidently a big help to Sophia.

Alexis’s eyes were full of fondness as he told her that. He cherished both Sophia and his child, so he was grateful to Amelia from the bottom of his heart for her considerate attempt to lighten their loads.

“I’m happy to have been of help.”

“Sophia was also very grateful. I hope you’ll go see her later.”

“I will. I want to see her too.”

Apparently that was all Alexis had to tell her, and he rushed off.

He must have been on his way to the Beltz Empire from here.

Amelia was genuinely glad she was able to help those two.

After a short time, Marie came to Amelia’s room. Apparently she had also come by Amelia’s room last night, but hearing from the maid that Amelia was still asleep, Marie had left quietly.

“I’m sorry. I never thought I would sleep for so long,” Amelia said as she welcomed Marie into her room.

“Oh, it’s fine. I’m glad you were able to get a restful sleep,” said Marie kindly as she took a seat across from Amelia.

Amelia wished to go see Sarge as soon as she could, but evidently

he and Alexis were speaking with the king this morning. Marie let her know that their talk was probably going to take a while.

“So, if you’re feeling all right, why don’t we go see Sophia? She’s been wanting to see you.”

“Yes, I’d love to.”

Remembering Alexis’s words, Amelia beamed with excitement. She wanted to see Sophia and her newborn child as soon as possible.

“Everyone’s been saying how grateful they are to you. But you had a hard time over there in the empire, didn’t you?”

When Marie acknowledged the hardships Amelia had been through, she looked down and nodded. “...I did. We figured out that the problem with the tool was its magic stone, but that was all we figured out. But it’s not just the magic stones—it seems like something affects magic being cast too. Sarge searched through various records left behind from the time when there were still mages in the empire.”

“I see. It’s a bit scary to hear that there’s an effect on casting magic too,” Marie said.

Amelia nodded in agreement. For a mage, it was terrifying to be sapped of more magic power than you were expecting.

“And I heard there was an assassination attempt made on the emperor. And that you saved him with your healing magic. You’ve really been through a lot, haven’t you?”

Amelia smiled and shook her head at Marie’s sympathy.

“Yes, but Sarge put a barrier up to protect my room, and he was by my side when I was feeling down. So I’m okay.”

Seeing Carloyd in his weakened state had worried her, but he wasn’t alone. Alois and Lyriann were by his side.

“I’ll also be living here starting today,” Marie said with a smile. “I doubt I can do much, but if you ever need help, just let me know.”

“That’s right, you will be. Thank you, that’s very reassuring.”

Marie would soon be marrying Third Prince Julius.

Ordinarily, as the sons of the king’s concubine, Est and Julius should have been granted peerages and become subjects of the monarchy after getting married. However, as the future king, Crown Prince Alexis wanted those two to remain as members of the royal family and assist him.

The brothers’ father, the king, had neither siblings nor cousins. Therefore, he’d had to personally take on all the responsibilities involved in governing the kingdom.

Furthermore, the cold weather was growing worse year by year, and every country on this continent was in danger of a food shortage. The kingdom had had to take countermeasures against famine as well as cooperate with other countries as the Beltz Empire enviously eyed the land on this side of the continent. As a result, it could hardly have

been said that Bedeiht had been attentive to domestic issues. That was likely why the situation in the Royal Academy of Magic had been overlooked.

Right now, all four princes were contributing to the kingdom in their own fields of specialty.

As the crown prince, Alexis was cooperating with foreign nations and working on improving relations with the Beltz Empire. Est would be taking on the role of guiding students at the royal academy. Julius, as the director of the Royal Magic Research Institute, was in charge of advancing as well as preserving the legacy of magical technology. And Sarge, through his botany and earth magic research, was working to solve the food crisis not only in this kingdom but in all the countries of the continent.

Each one of them was indispensable in improving the kingdom's future.

Alexis wished for all the brothers to remain together as members of the royal family and continue supporting him.

Crown Princess Sophia also happily agreed with Alexis's idea.

It would also make me happy to be together with Marie and Princess Chloe...

The life of a princess was different from that of a rural noble; Amelia would only have had to manage her own domain, but now she would have to work for the kingdom. The weight of the responsibility was completely different, so naturally, resolve was essential.

Amelia wished to support Sarge and live her life with him, and she had worked desperately hard towards that goal. That was why she felt very heartened by the fact that Marie and Chloe would be in the same position as her.

Also, with Est and Julius around, Sarge will be able to focus on his research.

Julius, who had always worried about his younger brother even when they were students, would surely continue to help him from here on. Of course Amelia would do her very best, but Julius's presence would also become a source of support for her.

And with Marie marrying Julius, she would become a princess, just as Amelia would. And so, she would be moving in to live in the private royal living quarters. Amelia found it heartening that she and Marie would be living in the same place.

"Once I get married, I'll become your older sister-in-law. You're my first and best friend, Amelia. I look forward to becoming your sister."

Amelia considered herself to be deeply indebted to Marie for showing her so much care when she had been isolated and suffering. At that time, Marie hadn't had any friends either, but now she called

Amelia her best friend.

“After all, you made all my dreams come true, Amelia. My dream of visiting a friend’s domain, of having a slumber party, and even my dream of marrying a wonderful person,” Marie said. She looked very adorable when she laughed with a bit of embarrassment.

Indeed, as Marie said, it was because of Amelia and Sarge that Marie had met Julius.

“The same goes for me. You are an irreplaceable friend, and soon you’ll be a treasured member of my family.”

Although Amelia was not yet married, Sarge’s brothers, the king, and the queen all treated her as if she were already family. And starting today, the same would go for Marie.



“Yes, I’m looking forward to it.”

Smiling at each other, the two joined hands. It was a very happy thing to be able to become family with one’s dearest friend.

“Well then, shall we hurry over to see Sophia?” Marie asked.

Since their destination was also within the royal living quarters, only one maid was needed to accompany Amelia and Marie on their way to Sophia’s room. Once they arrived, the maid announced their presence, and Sophia’s kind voice invited them to enter.

“Welcome back, Amelia. I heard you had quite a tough time over there,” said Sophia sympathetically as she sat up in bed. Her body was recovering with the aid of healing magic, but Alexis had apparently pleaded with her to continue resting for a while.

Next to Sophia was a baby crib. When Amelia turned to look at it, she saw a sleeping baby with the same golden hair as Alexis and Sarge. The baby’s skin was fair like Sophia’s, and while Amelia couldn’t see what color his eyes were, since he was asleep, they were probably a beautiful blue, just like the eyes of both his parents.

Although his life was still small, this child would one day become the king.

“Sophia, I know I’m a bit late, but congratulations,” Amelia said.

Sophia nodded with a dazzling smile filling her face and said, “Thank you. Just before you left, Est showed me the magical tool. That really brought me some peace of mind.”

In order to soothe Sophia’s nerves, Est had told her about the magical tool ahead of time. Since that had helped to calm Sophia, Amelia was glad he had done so.

“Really, thank you,” Sophia said again, grasping Amelia’s hands. “This child, being Alexis’s child, has very strong magic power. Without this tool, we would probably be having a difficult time.”

The bracelet that regulated the baby’s magic power was fastened around his little arm. The size of the bracelet could be adjusted with magic, which Alexis, as the baby’s father, would do until he learned how to control his own magic.

“I’m glad I was able to help,” said Amelia. She had been a little anxious about it, but she was genuinely glad she had suggested the idea. “Earlier, Alexis came by my room to thank me.”

“He did?” Sophia seemed surprised, but then she finally nodded in understanding. “That’s right. I think he was actually more nervous than I was, so he’s probably the one whom your magical tool brought the most relief.”

“Oh, no. All I did was come up with the idea. The one who drew up the plan for it was Sarge, and the one who actually made it was Est.”

“Well, if you hadn’t come up with the idea, they wouldn’t have been able to make it.”

Being told that, Amelia couldn’t help but feel embarrassed. Ideas alone didn’t bring results. The creation of the tool was all thanks to Sarge and Est’s cooperation.

Since the baby was still fast asleep, Amelia and Marie decided to wait until another day before trying once again to hold him. Then, they went to sit in the chairs near Sophia’s bed.

“Things must have been hard in the Beltz Empire. I can’t believe that you were nearly attacked, and that on top of that, there was an attempt on the emperor’s life during a time like this.”

“Yes...”

Remembering that series of events, Amelia looked down.

The previous emperor had three sons, Carloyd included. Carloyd was the eldest and the son of the empress. Then there were Igis and Sosey, who were the sons of different concubines of the emperor.

The previous emperor hadn’t decided on a successor. But then, due to his sudden passing, Carloyd—who was considered the furthest from the throne—became emperor.

According to rumors in the Beltz Empire, the Kingdom of Bedeiht had aided in Carloyd’s accession to the throne. Amelia wasn’t very informed about those circumstances, but knowing Alexis, he had probably been involved to some extent.

Igis and Sosey, who objected to their half-brother’s ascension to the throne, had joined hands and plotted to usurp the throne. However, the two of them had never gotten along before that time and were constantly antagonistic towards each other.

The two brothers, who were meant to be cooperating, began to grow suspicious of each other, so Sosey had likely resorted to such a violent method in an attempt to gain an advantage over Igis.

“If Emperor Carloyd had been assassinated, it could have started a war among the nations. It was lucky you were able to heal him quickly, Amelia.”

“...They were just Julius’s orders,” Amelia said in response to Sophia’s appreciation.

Alexis was going to the Beltz Empire again soon in order to help the just recently healed Carloyd.

Excessive support might give rise to more resistance.

The Beltz Empire was filled with people who held an exclusionary mentality—many more of them than Amelia had thought.

They went so long without interacting with other countries, so I guess that’s inevitable...

As it was now, the empire would be unable to regain its footing through its own power alone.

Suddenly, Amelia recalled Sarge's words. He had spoken them after someone had attempted to trespass in their rooms, which had been protected by Sarge's barrier magic: if they neglected the empire, then the land would likely become uninhabitable.

Indeed, that was what he had told her when he visited her room to check on her. He possibly knew to a certain extent what was inexplicably interfering with magic in the empire.

"Amelia, maybe you *should* rest a little more," Sophia said out of concern, snapping Amelia back to reality.

"No, I'm all right. It's just, so much happened, I got lost in thought for a moment."

Amelia apologized, feeling badly that Sophia, who had just given birth and was undoubtedly the more tired of the two of them, had to show concern for her. Nevertheless, Sophia had apparently decided that Amelia really should rest more.

"In any case, I wanted to express my gratitude. Thank you, Amelia. You saved both me and my child."

"It makes me happy too that I was able to help you."

Here, in her irreplaceable homeland, were so many people she held dear: the kindly, smiling Sophia; the little life that had just been born; and by Amelia's side, Marie. Amelia vowed anew to endeavor to solve the problem of the magical tools in order to protect this kingdom.

Amelia wouldn't be able to meet with Sarge that day until dinner.

After visiting Sophia, Amelia followed her suggestion to rest a bit more. Then, she offered some advice to Marie for her wedding preparations, and afterwards, in her room, she immersed herself in creating reference materials to give to Sarge later.

It was a simple task—all she had to do was write down the contents of the documents relating to magic that she had read in the Beltz Empire. Since they naturally hadn't been able to take any of the documents from the empire with them, Amelia had had to try her best to read and remember as much as she could. Now, she summarized those contents as she organized them in her mind.

It's been a long time since mages who could use elemental magic existed in the empire. The last confirmed report was over a century ago...

After that, there had been an increase in the number of those who wielded nonelemental magic, like Alois. Compared to the magic that had once existed there, that "magic-like power"—as Alois had described it—was very weak.

Being able to make objects float a little, clairvoyance... There isn't anything like being able to use elemental magic, right?

She traced the history of mages in the Beltz Empire as she sorted through the information she had memorized.

At some point, even those with slight magic power had completely disappeared from the empire. That had been around the same time that the emperor of two generations ago had been in power.

Magic was incredibly powerful. The emperor of that time, fearing the loss of that power from the empire, had tried to summon mages from other countries. At that time, the Kingdom of Janaki—which bordered the empire—had also seen magic power become limited to the royal family, and so had prohibited allowing the outflow of those valuable mages to other countries.

Accordingly, the empire had targeted the Kingdom of Bedeiht, in which mages were abundant, and the royal family, who were the sole wielders of light magic.

Although, the child of the kidnapped princess didn't have enough magic power to use elemental magic...

No matter how weak her power had been for a member of the royal family, the kidnapped princess had undoubtedly been a user of light magic. It was unthinkable that her child would not have enough magic power to use elemental magic at all.

Perhaps the princess's magic also weakened while she was in the empire?

Just as the magic stones gradually lost power, perhaps staying in the Beltz Empire for a long time resulted in a mage losing their magic, no matter how powerful they were.

Amelia noted down her thoughts alongside the facts she had memorized as she wrote out the documents.

If what she thought was true, then she worried for Alexis, who was making frequent trips to the empire. While he certainly had the strongest power in the kingdom, it was very unlikely he would be completely unaffected.

“In that case...”

“Amelia?”

Amelia, who was about to speak her fear aloud, turned around in surprise when she heard her name called. Behind her, Marie was looking at her with an air of slight exasperation.

“It's dinnertime already. Have you been here this whole time writing?”

“...I'm sorry. I just got carried away.”

She was sure that after popping in to see Sophia that morning, she and Marie had parted ways just past noon. But before she knew it, the view from her window had grown completely dark.

“Prince Sarge didn't show up either, so Prince Julius went to call him. Come on, let's go.”

“Okay.”

Amelia put away her documents without protest and left her room

with Marie.

“My apologies for keeping you waiting.”

In the dining room, Alexis, Est, and Sophia were already waiting for them. Eventually, Sarge also appeared, brought along by Julius.

“Sarge,” she called out to him, happy they were finally able to see each other.

Meanwhile, he looked sheepish and apologized. “I’m sorry. I just got preoccupied with my work.”

He must have been worried about his promise to not push himself. Amelia’s expression softened automatically. She was happy he valued his promise.

That was why she didn’t want to lie to him, and she told him truthfully, “My apologies as well. I ended up becoming fairly focused on what I was doing too. Marie just came by to get me.”

Sarge’s expression relaxed in relief.

“Both of you be careful,” Alexis told them.

They responded simultaneously.

“Yes.”

“I know.”

Then, dinner began.

Even though a wet nurse was with the baby, Sophia seemed to grow worried about him and returned to her room earlier than usual. Amelia assumed Sarge would also quickly go back to the library, but he, Alexis, and Julius were having a discussion about something. Thus, Amelia and Marie talked about the latter’s fast-approaching wedding.

“Your dress is very beautiful and luxurious. It really suits you, Marie.”

When Amelia had visited Marie’s room in the afternoon, she had arrived at just the right time to catch sight of her wedding dress. Marie had been trying it on for a fitting, and she had looked so beautiful in it that Amelia couldn’t help but let out a sigh of admiration.

“Sophia and the queen were very enthusiastic about it all. I think it may be a little too flashy for me.”

“Oh, no. I don’t think so at all.”

Only a dress as magnificent as that could complement and enhance Marie’s gorgeous looks. Amelia nodded to herself, knowing that Sophia and the queen understood that well.

“I’m sure Julius will like it too.”

“I hope so,” said Marie, blushing slightly. She looked so lovely that Amelia couldn’t help but smile.

“I’m sure you’re really busy right now, but you also need to start preparing soon, Amelia. Unlike our wedding, yours is in the spring.”

“...You’re right.”

Since she was marrying into the royal family, there was no getting around the fact that the preparations would be a large-scale undertaking. Amelia didn’t think she was as stunning a beauty as Marie, so she felt her own looks would pale in comparison when she stood next to someone as handsome as Sarge.

Ah, but... Even so...

More than the difficulty of the preparations, more than her lamenting over her plain looks, her joy at finally being able to marry the one she loved overshadowed all else.

“Spring can’t come fast enough,” she uttered without thinking.

But rather than teasing Amelia, Marie, in an effort to comfort her, said, “Spring is just around the corner.”

“Yes, you’re right.”

It would be best if they could solve the problem of the rain-producing magical tool before then. And in order to do that, Amelia needed to quickly complete those materials to give to Sarge. With that thought in mind, she and Marie—who also said she still had things to finish up—returned to their respective rooms a little earlier than usual.

Sarge was still speaking with Alexis and Julius. Those two together should be able to stop Sarge before he pushed himself too far. Thinking that, Amelia dove back into writing out the documents she had put on pause for dinner.

“Okay, done.”

When she finally finished them, it was already past midnight.

“It’s so late already... The new semester starts tomorrow, so I need to get to bed.”

Today had been the last day of summer holiday. If Amelia had already graduated from the academy, she probably would have been able to stay in the Beltz Empire for longer and been able to do a more in-depth investigation. That thought made her feel a bit disappointed, but due to the surprise attack on their rooms, both the king and Alexis had ordered them to come back home quickly anyway.

Amelia decided she would give the documents she wrote up to Sarge tomorrow morning before she left for school.

The next day marked the start of the new semester, and Amelia had to head off to school. When she saw Sarge at breakfast, she handed over the materials she’d created last night and then headed for the academy.

Starting today, she would be commuting to the laboratory along with Marie.

Sol and Meena took the time to come by and see her during their break and told her about how the crops were growing in the Lenia

domain as well as how her parents were doing. In particular, the fields that had been treated with magic growth-promoting fertilizer showed outstanding results: they had already grown to the point of being harvestable.

But that's probably because Sarge was the one who cast the magic on the fertilizer. The fact that the quality will differ based on the mage making the fertilizer is a bit of a problem.

They would have to make some adjustments so that other earth mages could also cooperate in making a fertilizer with a standardized level of quality.

At some point, while Amelia was analyzing the documents Sol had given her, the afternoon break came, and Marie invited her to lunch.

“Shall we go to the dining hall in the academy building?”

Ever since Sarge graduated, Amelia and Marie had both been using the break room in the lab for lunch. However, Amelia would only be able to enter the dining hall in the school while she was still a student. Remembering that Marie had said she wanted to go eat there together at least once, Amelia immediately agreed.

“Yes, let's go.”

Amelia herself had only used the dining hall for a very short period after entering the academy and before advancing to the Special A class.

Speaking of, an upperclasswoman whose name I didn't even know almost succeeded in spilling tea on me. That was really awful.

A lot of time had passed since then, and the climate within the school must have also changed. Amelia recalled that that had also been the time she first saw reenactment magic, and she stopped walking without thinking.

That's right, I ran into those people as soon as I entered the dining hall. Then Sarge protected me...

“What's wrong, Amelia?” Marie asked in confusion when she saw Amelia had come to a stop.

“I just remembered something from a long time ago. From when I was a first-year...”

When Amelia told Marie about that incident, she became indignant.

“That happened to you? That is just too cruel.”

“Sarge shielded me from the tea, and soon after, Julius used reenactment magic, so I ended up being fine,” Amelia said gently in an attempt to calm Marie.

“Reenactment magic... That's right.”

No one—no matter who they were—could elude that magic, which reproduced exact images of the past. Est would be the one fulfilling that duty in the future.

After she and Marie sat in open seats, Amelia surveyed the room. *Also, things have changed a lot here since that time*, she thought. All the students were chatting amicably, and there was no group of students doing anything like dominating over the others.

I'm glad...

Even if there were problems that weren't apparent, Est would eventually be able to ameliorate them as long as he was around.

Amelia didn't want anyone else to have to go through what she had. She wanted the academy to be a place that people would look back on as having been fun, even after they became adults.

This academy was a place in which to learn magic, but for someone from a rural domain that didn't have much interaction with other domains, it also represented a valuable opportunity to make friends. She wished people would be able to meet those they sincerely trusted, just like she herself had met Marie.

After school ended for the day and Amelia returned to the castle, she changed out of her clothes and quickly headed to the library right by her room. There, as she expected, was Sarge. Strangely, he had neither magic tomes nor reference materials opened before him and was just sitting in quiet contemplation.

He must have been mentally organizing all the information he'd read in the empire's old documents rather than going to the trouble of writing it down.

I'm not surprised he can do something like that...

While Amelia was impressed at his ability to process all that information without writing it down, she had no way of helping him.

What should I do?

Perhaps, since he seemed not to have noticed her, she should quietly leave. But just as she thought that, Sarge lifted his head.

"Amelia, welcome back," he said with a gentle smile.

His complexion looked good. Feeling reassured by his appearance, Amelia responded with a smile of her own and said, "Yes, I just returned."

Sarge led her to sit in the chair next to him.

"Thank you for the documents you wrote up. They were very helpful and easy to understand."

"It was no problem. I'm glad they're useful. Um, I actually thought of something while I was putting those together..."

Amelia told him what she thought was the reason that mages had disappeared from the Beltz Empire.

"I thought maybe there was something that made their magic power decline little by little, just like with the magic stones. And I was thinking maybe even the magic power of the kidnapped princess declined compared to when she was living in Bedeiht."

It was quite unbelievable that the princess's daughter wouldn't have inherited magic, even if her daughter's father had no magic ability. And that daughter's child, Alois, didn't have the ability to use elemental magic either.

Sarge responded to Amelia's idea with a deep nod of agreement. "Yeah, I think you may be right."

"Is Alexis all right?" she asked, concerned for the prince who was so often visiting the empire.

Sarge nodded and said, "Yes. Alec seems absolutely fine. He says he feels nothing off even when he casts magic. That might be because of how strong his power is."

"...He really is amazing."

From Amelia's point of view as a regular noble, Sarge and Julius's magic was considerably powerful. She wondered just how strong Alexis's magic had to be to surpass his brothers' to such an extent.

"Tomorrow, Alec will be going to the empire and staying there until Emperor Carloyd recovers. Thanks to your magic, his wounds should heal without a problem, so I don't think it will take a long time."

"Right."

Alexis's son had just been born. He probably would have rather remained by Sophia's side. However, the fate of the continent might very well be determined by who seized control of the empire. Taking that into consideration, Alexis was the best one to stay there, as he would be unaffected by the magic abnormalities.

"Is there anything else on your mind?" Sarge asked her.

Amelia pondered for a moment before speaking. "There shouldn't be anyone in the empire who can use magic. But despite that... How should I put this... I felt like I could sense magic."

"You did?"

"Yes. I could have been mistaken, though."

After she said that, Sarge sank into thought.

"If that was true..." he muttered. Then he started spreading out the materials that were on top of the desk. It seemed an idea had come to his mind, and at Amelia's words, that had turned into conviction.

Not wanting to disrupt Sarge, who was poring over the materials with a serious look on his face, Amelia moved to the next seat over and began working on the issue she had been grappling with.

Amelia had entrusted the enchanted water, which prevented insect damage, to Julius and the researchers at the laboratory, where they were investigating ways to both improve the water and increase its production. Now, she was working on the fertilizer imbued with growth promotion magic. With Meena's cooperation, she was working

to obtain consistent results by repeatedly running experiments and recording that data.

Back when I studied all of that earth magic knowledge, I never imagined I'd be making use of it for something like this.

Amelia's ex-fiancé Reese was a user of earth magic, but Amelia had always been the one who thought about what type of magic to cast and on which fields. That was why she had worked so hard studying earth magic, which she couldn't use herself and would ask Reese to cast for her. Now, that knowledge was helping Sarge. Considering that, she felt those days she'd spent studying earth magic hadn't been a waste.

I would like data from one more person who can use earth magic. After I get those average values, I can work on the next step.

Amelia consulted with Marie, who then issued a call to the academy for earth mages on behalf of the laboratory. There were apparently several earth mages among the first-year students. Amelia needed their cooperation to gather more detailed data.

Currently, the fertilizer was still just a prototype that was being used experimentally in the kingdom, but the Kingdom of Janaki was eagerly expecting the finished product. They needed to set up a system of production that would allow them to mass-produce a large volume of fertilizer at a standardized quality as quickly as possible.

"It's about time for dinner."

Once Amelia reached a stopping point, she called out to Sarge.

Recently, they had been getting so focused on their research that they had often had to have someone come call for them, so today, Amelia decided they should try to make sure to leave before that happened. Sarge also seemed to be considerably focused, but at Amelia's words, he stood up compliantly.

"Okay, let's go," he said.

When the two of them arrived in the dining room, Marie and Julius greeted them with surprise.

"I was just about to come call for you," said Julius.

"Thank you for always doing that," said Amelia. "I was trying to keep track of the time as much as I could."

Amelia and Sarge weren't the only ones who were busy. Julius and Marie were also occupied with their own duties. Despite that, they frequently came to call them for dinner, which Amelia felt badly about each time.

And yet, Julius still expressed his appreciation for her.

"Well, Sarge has always been that way. He'll forget about dinner unless someone goes to call him. It's actually a big help that he comes here with you like this."

"I'm sorry we've burdened both of you with such a heavy

responsibility. If you have any requests or need any help, just say the word,” Alexis chimed in, acknowledging their hard work.

“Thank you. The academy students will be helping out with the fertilizer. Once I get the average data, I want to make adjustments that will ensure a product of consistently high quality.”

“Got it. Janaki has said they were fine even with the prototype and to send it as soon as possible, but of course we can’t do that. Keep up the good work.”

“Yes, I’ll do my best.”

Magic wasn’t perfect, so some unintended side effects were possible. That was precisely why they needed to be careful about their product before exporting it to other countries.

“How about you, Sarge?”

Sarge raised his head when Alexis spoke to him.

“There’s something I want to confirm. If possible, I want to go back to the empire one more time.”

At his words, Amelia’s breath caught in her throat. Of course magic was powerful, so Sarge should be fine if he put up his magic barrier. However, that country was a dangerous place for mages. There was no way of knowing when he might end up unable to use his magic due to the intense consumption of energy.

Julius and Est both seemed to have the same idea. They turned their conflicted gazes towards Alexis.

“...Naturally, that’s not possible right now. Once Carloyd has fully recovered, his brother’s punishment has been decided, and the state of affairs over there has calmed down, then we can talk. Julius’s wedding is also coming up soon. Let’s consider doing it after that.”

Sarge looked somewhat dissatisfied, but he didn’t try to oppose Alexis.

“I’m going to the empire tomorrow. If there’s something on your mind, I can look into it,” Alexis continued, in an attempt to placate his brother.

“Okay, then. Later, I’ll give you a list of places I want you to check out.”

“Sure. Don’t push yourself too hard either,” said Alexis. Sophia looked a little uneasy at his words.

Even though Sophia was told someone like Alexis would be just fine, she was naturally anxious upon hearing that using magic in the empire consumed more power than expected.

“Est, Julius, take care of things while I’m gone. Marie and Amelia, I’d like you to help out Sophia if you can.”

“All right.”

“Understood.”

Est and Julius replied immediately, and Marie and Amelia both

nodded.

“Julius and Marie’s wedding is coming up, so I don’t plan to stay for very long this time. Sophia, I’m sorry, but please look after Linus.”

The crown prince and princess had named their baby Linus.

“I will. Please try to be careful.”

Sophia had been looking ill at ease, but when Alexis spoke to her, she put on her crown princess face and nodded.

The following morning, Alexis used transportation magic to travel to the Beltz Empire.

Amelia also grew quite busy. The academy students who could use earth magic assisted in imbuing the fertilizer with growth promotion magic. Amelia measured the power of the magic that had been infused in the fertilizer with a magical tool made for that purpose.

There’s such a big difference depending on who cast the magic...

As she recorded the data silently, Amelia couldn’t help but sigh at how difficult it would be to adjust the fertilizer. If they had continued on the basis of Sarge’s prototype, they would have run into serious problems. Even if it would decrease the quality of the magic somewhat, it was probably better to do so in order to make a product of consistently high quality.

She compiled the data at school and then brought it back to Sarge in the library.

Since he had entrusted what he had wanted to investigate to Alexis, Sarge was back again analyzing the history of magic in the empire. It was evidently necessary to understand that history in order to figure out how to make the magic stones function normally in the empire.

“Sarge, do you have a moment?” Amelia asked, thinking that he might have some more free time than usual since he had to wait on the results of Alexis’s investigation.

“Of course.”

Just as she expected he would, he immediately nodded and listened to what she had to say.

“It’s about the fertilizer imbued with earth magic,” she said, handing him the data she had just compiled. “It seems the efficacy of the fertilizer differs depending on the mage who creates it.”

“...Is that so?” Sarge promptly looked over the data, his face hardening. “Ah, I see,” he continued. “You’re right, there is a considerable difference. If you hadn’t looked into this, I don’t think I would have noticed.”

For Sarge, this type of magic was simple to use, so he hadn’t expected there would be such a big difference. There were some things he overlooked due to his brilliance. Amelia felt it was her role to make up for that tendency.

“I tried getting some more data after simplifying the magic. They all used the same growth promotion magic, but the growth rate was considerably reduced.”

The fertilizer Sarge had created as a prototype had significantly accelerated the growth of the crops and greatly reduced the amount of time needed for them to grow. However, there was hardly anyone who could use magic at Sarge’s level, so Amelia had had the students use considerably weaker magic and had gathered data based on that.

“Of course, it’s not adequate to be used in Bedeiht, but I think it will be fine in Janaki, where it’s warmer.”

Janaki was located farther south than Bedeiht and wasn’t yet suffering from the same level of cold weather. However, the end of the summer brought with it heavy rains that made the rivers flood, causing great damage to Janaki agriculture. Amelia had come up with the idea for this fertilizer after wondering if there could be a way to harvest the crops in Janaki before that damage occurred.

“If, like you said, they could harvest their crops at the end of summer, then we would be fulfilling our original goal. Your data is uniform too,” Sarge said, referring to the data Amelia had given him, and nodded deeply. “Even students shouldn’t have an issue infusing the fertilizer with this level of magic. We should be able to complete it earlier than expected,” he said with satisfaction, turning to Amelia with a smile. “Thank you. You helped me once again, Amelia.”

“O-Oh, no. I didn’t do anything.”

His dazzling smile and direct praise made Amelia look down in embarrassment. Like she had said, she hadn’t done anything so wonderful. As always, she had just reexamined the results of Sarge’s research from the point of view of an ordinary person.

The one who was worthy of acclaim was Sarge; Amelia was merely his assistant. Yet despite that, he praised her.

“That’s not true. If we can popularize this method, then we’ll be able to help Janaki considerably too.”

If she could get more data and make it so anyone could infuse the fertilizer with magic and get consistent results, then they could even hand the task over to the Royal Magic Research Institute. Then, just like with enchanted water, they would definitely be able to distribute it all at once.

With that, one more countermeasure against the cold weather would be complete. Amelia felt relieved to have a little less weight on her shoulders.

She had spent her summer holiday in the Beltz Empire and then immediately jumped into the earth magic-infused fertilizer when she got back. During that time, summer had already reached its end. Soon, it would be the harvest season.

Then, once again, she would become busy with examining the harvests from each region. Before that, though, was one important thing: Julius and Marie's wedding.

The preparations for that were now complete, so all that was left now was to wait for the day. Between her busy days, Marie had helped Amelia with her experiments.

That day would be her dear friend's big day. Amelia looked up at the sky and prayed the day of the wedding would be sunny and clear.

Alexis safely returned home a few days before the wedding. Amelia and Sarge went to see him and ask about the state of the empire.

Carloyd had made a full recovery, and his half-brother Sosey and his associates had been severely punished for plotting to assassinate the emperor. Sosey had a wife and child, who would also be stripped of their status and banished from the imperial castle. Furthermore, all of Sosey's associates would be exiled from the capital.

They had received a much harsher punishment than Amelia was expecting, but it must have been necessary for the stability of the empire.

Carloyd's other half-brother, Igis, was now officially acknowledging Carloyd as the emperor and had vowed his loyalty to him. However, unlike the naive Sosey, Igis was apparently quite the strategist. There were whispers that perhaps he had instigated Sosey to do what he had done.

Alexis explained all of that to them.

"There's also a possibility Igis was an accomplice. But unlike Sosey, he didn't leave behind any conclusive evidence of his guilt, so he couldn't be punished. In fact, if he were to be punished based on suspicion alone, that would invite criticism towards Carloyd. It's a difficult situation."

However, the empire had restored calm, even if it was just surface level.

The rain-producing magical tool was still malfunctioning, but Carloyd was telling those around him that the tool was merely a borrowed prototype, and that soon, they would be able to procure the completed tool. By saying that, he had apparently been able to curb their dissatisfaction.

Given that he was not involved in the creation of the tool, that might have been an irresponsible statement to make to people who were suffering from a water shortage.

However, the situation in the empire was so tense that Carloyd had little choice.

Some towns were even short on drinking water. And, as Amelia herself had sensed, the temperature was also gradually rising.

Carloyd was anxious to settle the situation quickly, one way or another.

“We decided to supply them with food and water. Thanks to Sarge, we have some to spare on that front.”

Due to the popularization of the new variety of grain and the enchanted water, the kingdom was anticipating that this year’s harvest would nearly equal those of previous years. That was why Alexis had decided they would send some of their stockpile as aid. Since Carloyd was the emperor, he had the authority to accept aid from foreign nations. Even the imperial aristocracy had to understand that.

“Then there’s the matter Sarge asked me to look into,” Alexis said, looking at his younger brother. “I went around to various regions and took some measurements. The capital, located in the center of the empire, really is hotter than the southernmost area. It actually seems like the farther you get from the center, the more the temperature drops.”

Sarge took the data Alexis had recorded about each region’s temperature and desertification and cast a quick glance over them.

“Also, there are several buildings on the outskirts of the capital that date back to the time when there were mages around.”

The buildings had fallen to ruin. However, as the crown prince explained, they could not be demolished because they had been locked with magic.

“They were made in such a way that no matter how decrepit the exteriors become, they can’t be destroyed unless you lift the magic and enter.”

“Where are those buildings located?” Sarge asked.

Alexis spread out a map of the imperial capital and marked several locations.

“That’s all of them,” he said.

Sarge sank into quiet contemplation as he compared the map and the temperature data from each area of the empire.

At some point, Est and Julius also came by to see Alexis, and the topic turned to Julius and Marie’s wedding. They were confirming the details of the day’s security and reception. Since Amelia would also be attending the wedding as Sarge’s fiancée, she joined in on the conversation in order to do his share of the listening too.

Then, after dinner and their usual postmeal chat, Amelia and Sarge headed to the library together. The two of them rarely returned to their own rooms after dinner.

Sarge still seemed to be brooding, so Amelia stopped walking and broached a question.

“Sarge, about the magic I sensed in the empire...”

“...Yes?”

Amelia had thought she would just be disrupting his thoughts, but Sarge raised his face and looked at her.

"I sensed it coming more strongly from the capital, not the castle. Is it possible that there's a connection with those old buildings in the capital?"

"I think that's likely," Sarge agreed. He spread out the map from earlier on the library desk.

"Looking at the data Alec recorded, the temperature has been rising, with the capital being the center of the heat wave. I think we need to investigate these buildings," Sarge said, but then he immediately folded up the map. "Before that, though, is Julius's wedding. The two of them have done so much for us, so I want to give them something to celebrate their marriage. Will you help me with that, Amelia?"

"Yes, of course," Amelia responded with a smile and a nod.

As Sarge said, Julius and Marie were always thinking about them and their tendency to get carried away with their research. Now those two, who were always looking after Sarge and Amelia, would soon be married. Even though the situation at hand was serious, Amelia wanted to celebrate their union wholeheartedly.

Both Julius and Marie had apparently wavered over whether they should have postponed their wedding considering the circumstances, but if anything, the Kingdom of Bedeiht was quite tranquil. The crops were growing without issue, and the harvests were unquestionably increasing, so much so that they had the capacity to offer support abroad. Therefore, they had decided that their wedding should be held as planned.

"What sort of gift did you have in mind?"

"A matching set of bracelet-shaped magical tools that create protective barriers, although short-acting ones."

Sarge took out what looked like a prototype magical tool and handed it to Amelia. She accepted it, put it on her arm, and tried channeling a bit of magic into it.

"Oh, this..."

She felt a barrier gently spread over her body.

With this tool activated, no one would be able to harm the wearer.

Julius was shouldering the responsibility of engaging in diplomacy and so was often traveling out of the country, but if he wore this tool, it would undoubtedly put Marie's mind at ease as she waited for his return.

"I created this prototype a while ago, but I suddenly thought of giving it to them for their wedding gift. I don't have much time, but with your help, I'm sure I can complete it before the wedding."

“Understood. Let’s do our best.”

It was unusual for Sarge to do something on a whim like this, but that was a testament to how much he wanted to do something for his brother and his fiancée. In that case, all Amelia could do was assist him to the best of her ability.

Thus, after repeatedly making adjustments to the tool in their spare time, they somehow managed to complete it a few days before the wedding.

The beautiful, carefully ornamented bracelet didn’t seem like a magical tool at first glance. It should make for an optimal wedding gift.

“We did it,” Amelia said, her voice brightening with satisfaction at what they had accomplished.

“Yes, we did. All thanks to you, Amelia,” Sarge told her.

Due to the advanced nature of barrier magic, it had been difficult to select a magic stone for the tool. They’d had to experiment over and over in order to find the most suitable gem. The data they had already collected from testing gems to use as magic stones in the rain-producing magical tool had proven useful for their current purpose as well.

Then, the night before the wedding, the usual crowd gathered at Marie’s house to have a sleepover.

Marie and Amelia.

Liliane and Meena.

As well as Chloe.

And this time, even Sophia joined them.

Her son, Linus, had a nanny, and Alexis was also with him. Perhaps because he had three younger brothers, Alexis was very good with children, so Sophia was able to leave things to him without worry.

Since they had more people at the sleepover this time, they headed to Marie’s room after having tea in the parlor.

“I’ve heard the rumors, but it really is big, isn’t it?” Sophia said in admiration of the large bed in Marie’s room.

“Yes, it is. I had it custom made,” Marie said, proudly showing off her bed to Sophia. “I never had many friends growing up, but I always longed to have a sleepover,” she said, deeply moved, as she surveyed her own room. “I’m so thankful that you all have made my dream come true. It’s been so much fun having sleepovers together.”

“Oh? You even went to the trouble to have such a large bed made? Is this really going to be our last sleepover?” Sophia said.

Hearing that, Marie looked perplexed. “Well, I’m going to be living in the royal castle from now on.”

“There are many empty rooms in the castle. Why don’t you

borrow one of the guest rooms to move this bed into? Then you can hold sleepovers whenever you want.”

At Sophia’s kind words, Marie’s face brightened, and she said, “Will you all still join me for sleepovers in the future?”

“Of course.” Amelia was the first to answer. “I didn’t have friends growing up either. But I consider everyone here a dear friend, so I want us to keep having sleepovers.”

“Yes, absolutely.”

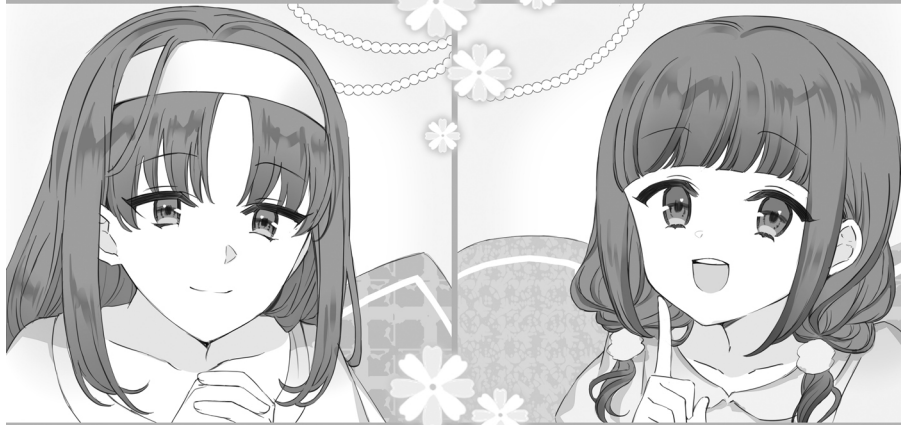
“Of course, if you’d have me, I would be happy to.”

Liliane and Meena also responded with smiles, and even Chloe agreed earnestly.

“You have all welcomed me in so warmly, even though I’m not from here,” she said. “I look forward to having more sleepovers together.”

Even after they all eventually wedded, they should be easily able to meet together in the castle.

Tonight, they would all sleep in this custom-made bed, and then it would be moved to the royal castle.



“Marie, congratulations on your marriage,” Amelia told her.

“You’re a day early, you know. But thank you.”

Seeing Marie looking so happy, Amelia felt a little jealous.

“Your time will come next spring, Amelia. It’ll be here before you know it,” Marie said consolingly, as if she could sense Amelia’s feelings.

“Though before that, there’s Est and Chloe’s engagement announcement party,” Sophia chimed in.

Chloe nodded humbly. “Yes. I am so grateful to be accepted here despite everything that happened.”

“It wasn’t your fault, Chloe,” Amelia said at once. Everyone else joined in with the same sentiment.

“Liliane, you and Kaid are going to be married next summer, right?”

“Yes, we are. It’s been delayed for a bit, but we were prioritizing our work.”

Amelia’s knight guard, Liliane, and Sarge’s knight guard, Kaid, were the same age as Alexis and Sophia.

Amelia had felt a little badly when she heard that they would have gotten married three years ago if they hadn’t taken on their roles guarding her and Sarge.

“Lady Amelia, I’m actually quite happy that I was able to return to my position as a knight, you know?” Liliane said gently, as if she had read Amelia’s mind. “Though Kaid was not opposed to it, my father never wanted me to become a knight. He used my engagement as an opportunity to make me leave the knights’ order. But thanks to Alexis and Sophia’s assignment, I was able to return to my position.”

Liliane had been able to go back to being a knight and, after seeing their respective masters married, she would be able to marry her longtime fiancé. With a smile, Liliane said she considered that the best path for her to take. Even Sophia, who knew Liliane as a close friend, nodded in agreement, so those really must have been Liliane’s true feelings.

“In a few years, we might be having sleepovers where we bring our children along too. If we’re going in order, Marie will be next to become a mother.”

Marie smiled softly at Sophia’s words and said, “I actually have a feeling it will be Amelia.”

“Yes, I’d have to say I think so too,” Liliane agreed.

Amelia turned bright red. “Th-That’s not...”

“I’m sure you’ll have a very adorable little girl.”

“And I’m sure she’ll have strong magic as well as a brilliant mind.”

With even Meena and Chloe agreeing, Amelia buried her face in the pillow, flustered.

Oh, but...

Even though Sarge would likely still be busy with his botany and magic research after they got married, she knew he wouldn't neglect Amelia or their children. Rather, he would love them devotedly.

That was the type of person he was.

When Amelia first arrived in the royal capital three years ago, she had felt nothing but unease about her future. But now she believed that no matter the situation, Sarge would be by her side, and she would undoubtedly be happy.

Amelia gently raised her face from the pillow and looked around. Everyone was wearing the same look she was. Their minds were filled with thoughts of their own futures, which they were certain would be filled with happiness.

Their sleepovers would continue for many years to come. And certainly at that time, they would be smiling as happily as they were now.

Chapter 4: Light and Dark

Julius and Marie's wedding was a lavish affair, and even the other nations sent words of congratulations.

Amelia couldn't help but cry when she saw how happy the couple looked. Seeing her like that, Sarge wordlessly pulled her in close to him.

The newlyweds were very delighted with the magical tools Sarge and Amelia had given them as a wedding gift. Marie in particular, who always worried over Julius frequently leaving the kingdom, thanked them through tears and told them their gift would give her some peace of mind.

Now that their wedding had come to a successful conclusion, it was Amelia's turn next. With the couple of the hour as well as everyone else around her reminding her of that fact, it began to dawn on her that she would finally be joined in marriage to Sarge.

The queen and Sophia had already turned their attention to Amelia; recently, the two of them had been calling for her more and more frequently after she returned from the academy.

"Apologies for summoning you so often, but there are many things we want to decide on now," Sophia and the queen told her as they laid out pictures of dress designs in front of Amelia.

Amelia herself had been busy up to now, so although she was anticipating her wedding, she hadn't even had time to decide on a dress yet. Considering that the harvest season was fast approaching and her time would soon be occupied in gathering the relevant data, she should probably prepare as well as she could while she had the time.

"I thought he might never get married," the queen said with a sigh while Amelia was looking through wedding dress designs. "He always liked being on his own and never tried to involve himself with others. Once his research began to receive recognition, he started prioritizing his botany research for the sake of the kingdom. I was worried he would spend the rest of his life alone."

Indeed, when Amelia had first met Sarge, he had even seemed annoyed by the guards at his side and often eluded them to be on his own. She felt he had changed a lot since that time. He no longer purposefully left Kaid behind, and he listened to Amelia's words of caution without showing any displeasure.

And it wasn't just Amelia—he even seemed to be listening to what his brothers told him when he wasn't too focused on his work.

The queen thanked Amelia for that, saying it was because of her. “...Oh, really, I haven't done anything.”

“That's not true. It was without a doubt you who taught my son the importance of interacting with others.”

“He also saved me,” said Amelia. Although she was delighted by the queen's words, she also wanted to express how much Sarge had helped her. “If he hadn't reached out to me at that time, I'm sure I would have lost the ability to trust in other people. The fact that now I have people I can rely on and who I can live with happily is all thanks to him.”

When Amelia said that, the queen broke into a happy smile, her beautiful features very much resembling Sarge's.

“How lovely. It must have been fate that brought you together, if both your lives were transformed into something wonderful through meeting each other.”

A fated love.

Amelia had always yearned for that from the time she was a young girl. She had even hoped that that dream might come true for her and Reese, but Amelia's destiny was her current fiancé, whom she would soon be marrying, Sarge.

That thought filled her chest with a sense of elation.

“Yes. I think so too,” Amelia responded with a smile.

Although Amelia was very busy, the preparations for the wedding were making steady progress thanks to Sophia and the queen's participation. Marie—who had become a member of the royal family first—was also offering Amelia support. Amelia's study sessions with Sophia had also recommenced, so she and Marie were learning about the royal family together.

Linus was growing at a good pace, which Sophia was very happy about. Although the baby had a nanny, Sophia was proactively taking care of him, feeling it was unthinkable for a mother not to hold her baby. Amelia and Marie both took turns cradling Linus in their arms as well.

Thanks to the bracelet regulating his magic power, Linus was a cheerful baby and generally slept soundly.

“If only Alexis had that bracelet when he was a child,” the queen said, her voice sounding slightly pained. It must have been heartbreaking for the king and queen to have to isolate Alexis.

“But from now on, no matter how strong a baby's magic may be, things will turn out fine. I suppose Julius is next? Or maybe Sarge?”

The queen seemed to be having fun even talking about Julius, who was the son of the king's concubine.

Amelia was glad that the magical tool had been made, not just for Alexis's child, but for all the children who would be born hereafter.

Sarge was devoting all his energy to solving the Beltz Empire's problems, so he and Amelia had started spending more time apart. Despite that, the two of them always spent time in the library together after dinner and before bed.

That day as well, they were in the library, both hard at work on their own tasks, when suddenly, Sarge called out to Amelia.

"I've finally gotten permission from my father, so I think I'll go back to the Beltz Empire soon."

"What?" Surprised, Amelia responded on reflex.

Now that he mentioned it, before Julius and Marie's wedding, Sarge had told Alexis he wanted to do just that. Amelia recalled that now. It wasn't as if she had forgotten about the situation in the empire, but at the moment, she was incredibly busy, and taking care of daily tasks took up all her effort.

She assumed he would be going with Julius again, but then she remembered that his older brother was now in the Kingdom of Sorina, so it was unlikely Sarge and Alexis would go to the empire together.

"Will you be going after Julius returns?"

"No. Since I'm only going to investigate those old buildings in the capital, I'm planning to go with just Kaid. I'll be back in two to three days."

"...I see."

She wanted to go with him, but since she was still a student, she had to prioritize her education, and besides, the harvesting of gree would soon begin in several regions of the kingdom. She would need to aggregate that data without delay. Perhaps because he understood that, Sarge didn't say anything about bringing Amelia along this time.

"Please be careful," she said, hiding her unease.

Sarge smiled and nodded.

"I'll be fine. Kaid will be with me. I'm sure you're busy with preparations too, but don't overwork yourself."

Amelia nodded at his considerate words.

But even if it's just for two or three days, I don't like the idea of being apart.

When she had gone on her first diplomatic mission, they were still together despite having different roles. And even when they had gone to the empire, he had taken her with him.

But this time, they would really be apart. Amelia felt a bit ill at ease about that.

However, Emperor Carloyd had recovered, the culprits had been apprehended, and all of their accomplices had been punished. Moreover, Kaid would be with Sarge.

So—she told herself—he would be okay.

“I’ll definitely be back within that time frame.”

“That’s a promise, right?”

“Of course.”

Then, two days later, Sarge headed to the Beltz Empire with only Kaid at his side.

“It’ll be fine, Amelia,” Marie said to comfort Amelia when she kept unconsciously stopping her work due to worry.

Both Marie and Sophia must have spent many days like this, unable to do anything but wait.

Becoming the wife of royalty meant she would have to get used to these types of days. Despite understanding that, Amelia couldn’t settle down. In an effort to soothe her, Liliane told her, “Kaid is with him, so he’ll be fine. He is very strong, after all.”

“You’re right. Thank you.”

Of course, Kaid was a reliable knight.

Amelia had no choice but to do what she could here.

They had begun to harvest gree in the Lenia domain, and her father had sent her a record of the crop yields in a letter.

I can’t believe my father wrote such detailed data.

Her father had never shown an interest in the data she collected before. But after she became engaged to Sarge and part of the Lenia domain became a sort of agricultural testing ground for the kingdom, he had begun sending over detailed data in her place.

Her father was becoming more actively involved than ever in the domain’s work. He seemed happy that he could be useful to the kingdom and also that the data from the Lenia domain was considered important.

He probably also felt liberated from the sense of inferiority towards earth magic that he had felt for so long.

She received the data from her father on this year’s harvest in the Lenia domain, and then the data she had requested from various other farmlands started pouring in. As a result, Amelia grew busy, and soon, she didn’t even have the time to worry about Sarge.

Moreover, he had said he would return in two to three days.

After he returned, she would be busy organizing the data he brought back from the Beltz Empire, so for the time being, she should focus on the work she could get done now.

However, even after three days passed, Sarge did not return. His investigation in the empire must have been taking longer than expected. Kaid alone probably couldn’t stop Sarge from getting carried away by his research.

So she thought, but naturally her anxiety rose.

Sarge promised me he would definitely be back within three days...

Perhaps he was returning today, then. Thinking that, she went straight to the castle after school ended, but Sarge had yet to return. Julius would be coming home tomorrow, so she decided that when he arrived, she would consult him about Sarge not having come back yet.

However, even before that, Alexis called for Amelia. She was sure he had gone to Janaki to negotiate about the fertilizer infused with growth promotion magic. Feeling uneasy that he had returned so suddenly when he was still supposed to be out of the country, Amelia hurried over to see him.

Alexis was frantically rattling off instructions to his retainers. Amelia's breath caught in her throat at the sight of his urgency.

"Ah, Amelia."

Alexis immediately noticed Amelia, who was standing still at the entrance to his room. At his urging, she sat down, albeit still feeling restless. Then he told her, "I heard that Sarge hasn't returned from the empire yet, so I just went and came back."

Alexis, who could travel easily with transportation magic, had apparently already gone to the empire to check things out. Amelia had a bad feeling; she clenched her hands.

Had something bad happened?

"It seems he went into one of those old buildings in the capital and hasn't come out yet," Alexis said.

"...Ngh."

Even though she'd been expecting it, her tightly clenched hands began to shake.

"Carloyd was also worried about Sarge not coming back, but he doesn't have a way of contacting us here from the empire. We'll have to secure some method of communication for the future."

Sarge had opened the magically locked door and gone inside, but then the door had closed again on its own. Since there were no mages in the Beltz Empire, no one was able to check on the situation inside.

"Knowing Sarge, it's possible he's just gotten absorbed in his research. But it's been three days since he went inside. Since Kaid is there with him, I would think he would have tried to get him to leave even if only for a moment."

"That's...true."

Amelia had heard that before Sarge met her, he would even go a whole day without eating when he was focused on his work. However, three days without any sort of communication was naturally worrisome.

"Sarge promised he would be back in two to three days. I don't think he would have forgotten that."

He had promised not to do anything reckless.

He had promised to return on time no matter what.

“Right, I agree. That’s why I went straight to the building he entered, but I wasn’t able to open the door. It seems the method of opening it is not as simple as channeling magic into it. Even the imperials looked into it for me, but they didn’t seem to know either.”

So then, thinking Amelia might know something, Alexis had called for her.

She was speechless.

Amelia wracked her brain desperately. She had also looked over the documents relating to the mages who had once inhabited the Beltz Empire. But even as she tried to remember, she felt there hadn’t been any accounts relating to buildings.

Sarge had spoken about the old buildings that remained from that era, and he’d said it should be possible to unlock them with magic. In that case, maybe Sarge had found a way to open the doors of that building.

Old buildings...

Amelia recalled the Beltz Empire’s imperial castle.

Those detailed decorations carved into the sandstone—she had thought they looked almost like magic circles.

The castle looked as though it had a considerably long history, so it was possible that those buildings had the same decorations engraved on them as well.

“Please take me to the Beltz Empire with you. I think the hint to lifting the magic locking the door could be written on the building.”

“On the building?”

“Yes. When I was in the empire before, I had a thought that the designs on the castle walls looked like magic circles.”

“I see. Okay, then.”

Alexis accepted Amelia’s words and immediately took action despite having just returned from the empire. Julius would be returning home tomorrow, so Alexis told Est about the situation and that he would be going to the empire with Amelia.

“Understood. Shall we be on standby after Julius comes back?”

“Yes, that’d be great. If I need help, I’ll contact you.”

Having heard the circumstances, Est seemed understandably concerned, but he promised that he would take care of things while Alexis was away and stay on alert with Julius after he returned.

“Amelia, are you all right with us leaving right now?”

“Yes, I don’t mind,” Amelia promptly agreed. She was still in her uniform, and she had left her documents behind in the library, but she was so worried about Sarge that she wanted to head to the empire as quickly as possible.

“All right, then, let’s go.”

Amelia went to Alexis’s side, and he immediately cast

transportation magic, bringing them to the Beltz Empire.

So fast...

She knew his magic was strong, but even so, the speed of it was unbelievable. They had traveled so quickly she hadn't even been aware of it happening; before she knew it, they had arrived in the empire.

Also, they had materialized in front of the imperial palace rather than in the building where Amelia and the others had first arrived. Alexis had been able to transport them all the way here even without the aid of a magic circle.

"Let's get Carloyd's permission first just in case and then head over immediately after. I want to investigate around the building as much as we can before it gets dark."

"Yes, understood."

The sun set much later in the Beltz Empire than it did in Bedeiht. It would probably take a long time to search all over the building. They could have lit their way with magic, but that would make them stand out too much in this country without magic. However, they were too concerned about Sarge to wait until tomorrow morning.

Alexis called out to the guards in a familiar manner and proceeded into the castle. His attitude more closely resembled that of a good friend visiting socially rather than that of the crown prince of Bedeiht. That was why the imperial guards were able to guide Alexis to the emperor with such a lack of caution.

As soon as they entered the room, Alexis spoke. "Carloyd, I brought Amelia with me. She's Sarge's fiancée and is much more knowledgeable about old magic than me. I want to start our investigation right away."

Carloyd nodded at Alexis in a similarly familiar manner.

"Understood. But I want you to exercise sufficient caution. Not even I have a clue what's hiding in that building. I thought it was just an old, harmless building..."

Carloyd's attitude was also much different from the way he had interacted with Amelia and the others when they had come. He and Alexis, who spoke on equal terms, must have had a relationship akin to friendship.

Considering their respective positions, it was unlikely that they could ever become close friends, but having caught a glimpse of Carloyd's loneliness, Amelia was glad to see he had someone with whom he could exchange words in a friendly manner.

Carloyd nodded with a gentle expression when Alexis introduced Amelia to him.

"I know her. She healed me with magic after I was attacked. I'm grateful from the bottom of my heart for that," he said, his eyes calm.

Seeing that, Amelia felt relieved. It seemed like being betrayed by someone close to him hadn't changed him.

"I owe you my life, and yet I allowed your loved one to enter a dangerous place. I'm truly sorry."

In spite of Carloyd's apology, someone without magic power couldn't have done anything to help.

Alexis's expression also changed slightly.

"Sarge is much more cautious than I am, and I don't think he would have done anything reckless. And yet we find ourselves in this situation. Something unexpected must have happened. I'm sorry, but we're going to head there now. Is it all right if we inspect the building?"

"Sure. All those buildings are very decrepit, so much so that I was thinking of demolishing them if possible. Feel free to do whatever you want to the building as long as it doesn't harm the citizens of the city."

"Got it. Thank you. I promise no one will get hurt," Alexis responded, then shifted his gaze to Amelia.

Amelia nodded wordlessly. Then, in an instant, their surroundings changed. Perhaps because of the short distance they traveled, Amelia hadn't even sensed any magic being used this time.

In front of them was a large building that seemed to be on the verge of crumbling at any moment. Amelia could sense the same magic she had felt on her last trip to the empire.

Is that magical energy coming from this building?

Amelia took another look at the building before her.

Perhaps due to magic, the base structure of the building had endured, but there were also certain spots that were weathered away and seemed about to fall apart. Also, as she had predicted, the outer wall of the building was made of sandstone adorned with intricate decorations.

However, the building looked even older than the imperial castle—there were spots on the outer wall that were crumbling away, so even if there were ancient magic words or magic circles included in the decorations, they would be hard to pick out.

For now, they headed for the front of the building to examine the door. Alexis tried moving it, but even though the building itself was eroded, the door was unyielding.

"Even if I attack it with magic, it just gets repelled," Alexis said after trying to do just that.

"This magic..."

Amelia inspected the door a little more closely and found that it had been locked with a type of magic used a considerably long time ago.

Amelia gave an explanation to Alexis, recalling what was written about ancient magic language in the books in the castle library.

“The magic that was cast on this door is magic that was used over a century ago. There are several strict conditions for casting and undoing the spell. Though I’ve heard that since it takes so much time to do so, new magic was developed and this type of magic fell out of use.”

That must have been the magic commonly in use at the time that this structure was built.

“The locking magic used nowadays is mainly determined by the spell, and it’s also easy to set up.”

“Ah, that’s right.”

There were various types of locking magic: either the spell could only be lifted by the person who cast it or a person designated by the caster; or anyone could unlock the door by simply channeling some magic into it. Amelia had heard that the barrier magic Sarge often used was also a practical application of the same magic.

“However, the locking magic used on this door is incredibly old, and the method for undoing it is a bit troublesome,” Amelia explained while she examined the door.

“And that method would be?”

“A password is needed. Also, that password must be hidden in the outer wall of the locked building.”

The locking magic was completed once the password was engraved on the building.

However, since that meant anyone would be able to unlock it, it was common for the passwords to be disguised in the designs on the wall. In general, the passwords used ancient magic language and were supposed to be five words long.

Amelia approached the building, trying to examine the wall carefully, but she abruptly felt a rush of magical energy leaving her body, and she trembled from the shock.

She quickly tried to move away but suddenly grew dizzy, and her eyes closed.

“Be careful!”

Alexis propped Amelia up as she began to stagger.

“Are you all right?”

“I-I’m sorry. I felt as if my magic was being sapped away for some reason...” she explained. Alexis then looked warily at the building.

“Is it because of this building?”

“I think so...”

Alexis brought the pale-faced Amelia away from the building.

“It’s just like the phenomenon Sarge described of the magic stones being consumed too quickly. I heard that using magic in the empire

drains more energy than normal...”

“That’s right. Julius also said the same thing.”

Not only Sarge but Julius had confirmed that.

After she told Alexis that, he looked grim.

“If that’s true inside the building as well, then I hate to think what’s happened to Sarge and Kaid. But if we get close to the building, you’ll be in danger. What should we do? Maybe—”

“I will be fine,” she said, cutting him off, but Alexis wouldn’t hear it.

“I don’t intend on putting my precious younger sister in harm’s way. Amelia, will you be all right here?”

He was asking if she no longer felt her magic being sapped away.

She nodded. “Yes... I’ll be okay here.”

At her response, Alexis left Amelia where she was, then approached the building.

All Amelia could do was watch Alexis as he walked away.

Sarge was probably in danger.

She wanted to investigate the building right away, regardless of what it might do to her. However, Alexis was unlikely to allow that.

Stewing in her frustration, Amelia suddenly saw a small image projected on the ground at her feet. It was so small she could cover it up completely with the palm of her hand.

“Huh?”

Surprised, Amelia crouched down to get a better look at it. The image was a projection of the outside of the building she had just been looking at. She could clearly see the sandstone engraved with those detailed, magic circle-like decorations.

“I’m showing you what I can see, Amelia. I can’t make the image any larger, though, since it would stand out too much,” she heard Alexis’s voice say.

Amelia instinctively looked around for the voice, which sounded as if the crown prince were right next to her, but it was coming from the image itself. Rather than projecting an image from the past, Alexis was showing Amelia what he was looking at right at that moment.

“I think this should be fine. I can hear you over here too, so let me know where you want me to look.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

With the aid of Alexis’s magic, Amelia could take a close look at the building without having to approach it. She hadn’t imagined they could do things this way.

Relieved that she could continue her inspection, she focused on examining the building. The spell for unlocking the door was likely hidden among these designs.

Amelia asked Alexis to go around the building a few times. Most

of the designs were simply that, but ancient magic words would be cleverly hidden among them. Those were probably the incantations necessary for unlocking the door.

“Could you please go back to that spot just now? The one on the right.”

However, reading them was difficult, since there were so many spots on the outer wall that were crumbling away, and a few spots where only fragments remained. Even still, Amelia had to make her best guess based on the writing that was still visible.

Alexis walked around the building several times more, following Amelia’s directions. While they continued their investigation, Amelia felt an unpleasant sensation, as if her magic was being drained even from this spot, at a remove from the building.

Moreover, despite the fact that her surroundings were already getting dark, she felt that the temperature was rising.

Could it be this building is the cause of both the abnormal consumption of the magic stones and the exceptional heat in the capital?

Amelia felt dizzy from the heat and the depletion of her magic, but Sarge was inside that terrifying building. Knowing that, she couldn’t bring herself to stop, no matter how unwell she felt.

“Amelia, are you okay?”

Alexis noticed Amelia’s condition and came running over to her in a haste.

“Doing any more of this is going to be dangerous. You should rest somewhere farther away.”

“But Sarge is inside there. Please, let me do this,” she pleaded desperately, but Alexis shook his head.

“No. Sarge will suffer the most if anything happens to you. Also, without you, I won’t be able to figure this out. I can still send you an image even if you move a little farther away. You can tell me what to do from there.”

“...Okay.”

Amelia didn’t want to comply, but right now they needed to find the spell to unlock the door. She moved a little farther away from the building, and watching the image Alexis transmitted to her, she searched frantically for the way to lift the magic.

Then, around the time her surroundings were plunged into darkness, she was finally able to locate the ancient magic words that were hidden in the walls.

Five words are hidden among the decorations on the wall. If we combine them, we should be able to open the door. I need to figure it out fast.

Amelia tested out several incantations in different combinations. Even testing out the spells consumed her magic.

In the midst of her repeated attempts, she was struck with a cold sensation in her fingertips. She must have used up too much of her magic. She had thought she was still fine, but she had felt several times already that her magic energy was being absorbed, so at this point she must have used up a significant amount.

“Amelia, I’ll do it.”

Noticing what was happening, Alexis began chanting the spells in Amelia’s place.

Just like Sarge had said, Alexis had enormous magic power, and no matter how many times he made a mistake, he never expressed any discomfort.

At some point during his several attempts, he was finally able to find the right combination of words. Amelia was watching from afar per Alexis’s orders, and he seemed to have successfully cast the right spell to unlock the door.

Sensing the door open, Amelia dashed over to the building.

“Amelia?”

Alexis was unable to stop her before she ran straight into the building, wanting to find Sarge.

“...I can’t believe how dark it is in here.”

Amelia was about to run even deeper inside, but the intensity of the darkness made her stop in her tracks.

Even though the sun had set, it shouldn’t have been this dark. Amelia was unable to even see her own feet, and her breath caught in her throat.

What should I do...?

She had just entered the building, and yet she had already lost her bearings.

“Sarge...”

She clenched her hands, which were nearly shaking, and called his name.

Without a doubt, he was in this building. If he were conscious, he would have responded. Thinking that, she called out his name over and over, desperate and beseeching.

“Sarge!”

She must have called his name countless times.

Suddenly, she saw a bluish-white light from afar.

“Amelia?”

From that direction, Amelia heard the voice she’d been hoping for. She completely forgot her fear of the dark and started running towards that light.

“Sarge!”

The corridor felt impossibly long. The darkness cloaking her surroundings must have made it seem even longer than it was.

That pale light grew larger in size until finally she could clearly see around her. She was in a long corridor enclosed by walls adorned with the same intricate details that were present on the outside walls of the building. However, in here the ornamentation was in considerable disrepair, and a part of the wall had broken off and fallen to the floor.

Amelia ran like mad, almost tripping countless times.

“Sarge!”

“Amelia.”

She thrust out a hand and felt another clasp hers tightly. This thoroughly familiar sensation was no doubt Sarge’s hand.

“I’m so glad...”

Even the worst-case scenario had crossed Amelia’s mind, so she felt relieved from the bottom of her heart to see he was well. Meanwhile, Sarge looked uncharacteristically bewildered; he seemed confused as to why Amelia was here.

“What are you doing here, Amelia?”

After getting her breathing under control, Amelia explained the particulars of how she had arrived here.

“Emperor Carloyd told Alexis that you went into this building and never came back out. Alexis actually came to the empire alone first, but when he couldn’t open the door, he contacted me.”

“...I see. So you were able to find the spell to open the door, then.”

“Yes. The magic locking the door was quite old, but I remember once reading about examples of those types of spells in a book about ancient magic language,” Amelia responded.

Sarge nodded with understanding.

“What is this building? What in the world...”

“I’d like to explain in detail, but first we need to get out of here. It’s too dangerous in here. Where’s Alec?”

At his question, Amelia realized that she had left behind the crown prince.

“Outside...”

“That’s good, then. If he had also come into the building and the door had closed again, there probably wouldn’t be anyone else who could open it. Kaid is farther inside. I’ll have him keep watch over the door with my brother.”

Having said that, Sarge, still holding Amelia’s hand, led her into an inner room.

Amelia should have known that once someone entered the building, the locking magic would automatically activate again.

Despite that, she had thought of nothing but her concern for Sarge and just dashed into the building. If Alexis hadn’t stopped himself

from entering, they would have really been in trouble.

"I'm sorry. I was just so worried about you..."

Rather than her saving him, they would both have been trapped. That thought frightened her anew.

"I understand. I also came inside without much caution, drawn by my own curiosity. If you hadn't come here, Amelia, we probably wouldn't have been able to get out."

He and Kaid had brought along enough food and water, but their supply was only for two or three days, which they'd assumed was the longest they would stay. Amelia shuddered at what might have happened if she and Alexis hadn't been able to open the door.

"I'm sorry. Although the situation took me by surprise, I probably could have avoided it if I had been more careful. I made you worry."

He certainly would have acted more cautiously in the past. However, Amelia felt Sarge had seemed a bit impatient recently. And it wasn't merely because the rain-producing magical tool hadn't been working properly. He appeared to be deeply concerned about something, and she could sense that his impatience to solve that problem as quickly as possible was growing stronger.

"Sarge," she said, clasping his hand again and entwining her fingers in his.

The two of them were similar in many ways; they managed to understand each other even without having to put their thoughts into words. That was why they didn't say much to each other.

However, no matter how close one person might be to another, it was impossible to understand them completely. Thus, the two of them should not hold back their words.

Amelia understood now that she shouldn't hesitate to express her feelings to her partner, so she put her honest feelings into words and shared them with Sarge.

"I want to become the most important person to you."

No matter how much she was his sole assistant, his sole fiancée, she hadn't been able to tell him. Nevertheless, those were— unquestionably—Amelia's true feelings.

"I want you to love me the most. And I want you to rely on me the most. I know I still can't catch up to you, but if there's anything you're worrying about, please confide in me. If there's something you want to do, please let us do it together."

"Amelia..."

He squeezed her fingers entwined in his.

"Don't leave me behind anymore, like this time..."

Amelia knew that since she was still a student, there were many things they couldn't do together. She knew she was just being selfish.

She had only been away from Sarge for a few days, but she had

ended up feeling incomplete without him by her side.

She couldn't stop herself from wishing to return as quickly as possible to spending their irreplaceable time together.

"I'm sor—"

"You don't need to apologize."

She willingly surrendered herself to his embrace as he pulled her in close.

"This experience has made me realize that I can't be apart from you either," he told her.

"You too?"

"Yes. It took a lot more time than I was expecting to lift the magic locking the door. I thought I wouldn't have enough time to properly investigate the inside. But I told you I'd be back in two to three days, and I didn't want to break that promise I made to you. That's why I got impatient and wasn't as careful as I should have been."

"The promise you made to me..."

Perhaps the two of them had thought that they were stronger when they were alone.

Amelia had held her head high no matter what people said to her, even if they disliked her for no reason, and Sarge had completed all his work on his own.

However, now that they had gotten to know each other's warmth and love, they couldn't go back to that time when they'd been unaware of it.

Besides, there's strength to be gained from our feelings for each other. And things we can't do alone, I know we can do together...

She wanted to prove that.

Amelia looked around as Sarge continued to hold her in his arms. At the end of the dark corridor was a room much larger than what she'd been expecting. On one wall were magic circles, glowing a bluish-white. That pale light Amelia had seen earlier was evidently coming from these circles. Also, in this room, she didn't feel any unpleasant sensation of her magic being sapped away.

"Sarge, what is this...?"

Sarge had his cheek against her black hair and his eyes closed, but at her question, he raised his head.

"I think that magic you sensed in the capital was coming from these magic circles. They're quite old, like this building, but still working."

Amelia squinted and closely examined the magic circles. They looked fairly complex, but she was able to pick out some ancient magic words.

"This is..."

It was not elemental magic.

However, this foreboding sensation was absolutely not light magic.

“This is the first time I’ve ever seen this type of magic too. However, there were records among the Beltz Empire’s old documents that mentioned there were once people who used ‘dark magic’ here.”

“Dark...magic.”

Even just saying it aloud sent a shudder of fear through Amelia.

Forcibly taking other people’s magic power—that magic must have been the complete opposite of the light magic that the royal family of Bedeiht could use.

“These magic circles seem to be stealing magic energy and channeling it into something somewhere else. Whatever it is, it’s been supplied with a lot of magic power over a long period of time. It can’t be anything good.”

These magic circles were capable of stealing all the magical energy that was used in the Beltz Empire. Just what was that amount of power, stolen over such a long period of time, being used for? When she thought about it, she came to the same conclusion as Sarge—it could not be anything good.

“Anyway, right now, we need to do something about these magic circles.”

“Yes, you’re right,” Amelia said in agreement as she stared fixedly at the magic circles.

To remove a magic circle, one needed to dismantle it through analysis.

It could be dismantled little by little by channeling magic into the different parts of the circle in the order in which they’d been drawn. Analyzing so many magic circles was going to take a significant amount of time.

“Sarge, Amelia.”

At that moment, they heard someone call their names—when they turned to look, they saw Alexis running towards them.

“Brother, the door—”

“I left it to Kaid. He should be fine for a little while.”

While the two of them had been talking, Kaid had gathered what the situation was and had made his way to the door to keep it open.

In order to keep open a door that was locked with magic, the only option was to continue channeling magic into it. Right now, Kaid had taken Alexis’s place and was doing his best to keep the door from locking again.

“I believe these magic circles are what’s sapping away magic power. If we destroy these, that phenomenon should stop.”

After hearing Sarge’s explanation, Alexis turned his gaze to the wall.

“...These circles?”

Alexis approached the glowing bluish-white circles and gently brought a hand to them.



“Can you parse it?”

“I can try. However, it’s probably going to take a while. Alec, please take care of the door while I do that.”

“All right. You can leave that to me,” Alexis responded. Then he went back in the direction of the door.

They didn’t know how long it would take to remove all these magic circles, nor did they know how long Alexis would be able to keep the door open even with his exceptionally powerful magic. Nevertheless, they had to get it done.

Amelia was feeling panicked at needing to hurry, but suddenly, she recalled what she had previously read in a book describing old magic circles.

“Sarge, I’ve read that when there are multiple magic circles, one of them is considered to be the main circle.”

“The main circle?”

“Yes. In order to undo the magic circles, you only need to analyze that main circle. I’m fairly certain that’s what I read in a book about old magic circles in the castle library.”

“I see. You know more about magic than me, Amelia. Having you here is a huge help.”

“I really don’t,” she denied him hastily. “I just happened to read that book.”

However, it was true that Sarge’s specialties were botany and earth magic, and recently, he had been devoting himself to selectively breeding grain. It was because Amelia used her free time to read that she had that information.

“I’m glad I could help,” she said, then stared intently at the magic circles drawn on the wall.

“Considering what the magic circles are used for, the main one is probably skillfully hidden. The main circle should have one extra ancient magic word.”

If they could locate that circle and successfully analyze it, they could obtain the spell that would undo all the other magic circles at once. Amelia explained that to Sarge.

“Got it.”

Either way, that didn’t change the fact that they would have to check the circles one by one. However, Sarge thanked Amelia, saying that merely having to check the circles was entirely different from having to analyze each one individually.

“Let’s hurry and get to work.”

The two of them proceeded to check the circles together, starting on either end of the wall. Searching for the deftly hidden magic words took a lot of concentration and was quite difficult work.

“Ah.”

Nonetheless, after checking however many magic circles, Amelia spotted an ancient magic word hidden in one of them.

“I’ve found it, Sarge. This one is the main one.”

Sarge came rushing over and, after checking it over as well, confirmed that Amelia was right. Now all that was left was to analyze it.

“How is Alexis doing?”

Their surroundings were already dark, so a lot of time must have passed. Out of concern for Alexis, she asked Sarge about him.

After communicating with his brother via magic, Sarge nodded. “He seems fine. Let’s keep going with our analysis.”

“Yes, understood.”

However, they also didn’t know just how much time it would take to analyze the circle. They should work as quickly as they could.

Amelia and Sarge stood side by side in front of the magic circle.

In order to analyze a magic circle, one had to trace over the circle with magic in the same order it was drawn in, closely analyzing each part of it. The sequence it was drawn in could be identified by following the magic that was contained within it, but complex magic circles made that difficult to figure out, and one mistake meant they had to start over from the beginning.

Working together, the two of them carefully analyzed the complicated magic circle step by step. As expected, months and years had passed since this circle was drawn, and the closer they came to the end, the more difficult it became.

“Ah...”

There was a spot that was difficult to comprehend due to the crumbling wall, and Amelia ultimately made a mistake.

“I’m sorry...”

Feelings of self-loathing started to take hold, but Sarge gently stroked her back.

“It’s all right. I didn’t know what to do just now either. Let’s start over from the beginning.”

“Okay.”

Encouraged by his words, Amelia once again turned to face the magic circle.

They failed several times, and each time the two of them started over from the beginning. Then, around the time their surroundings started to brighten, they were finally able to successfully complete their task.

Sarge supported Amelia as she sank to the ground in relief.

“Amelia, I’m sorry for making you overwork yourself. But we did it. Now, let’s get rid of the rest of the circles and hurry over to my

brother.”

“Yes,” she responded. However, perhaps due to relief, or perhaps due to exhaustion, her legs were shaking so much she could barely stand.

But if they didn’t evacuate this building, they would only be putting a greater burden on Alexis to keep the door open. They used the spell they’d obtained from analyzing the main magic circle to undo the other circles. Shortly after, the palely glowing circles all went dim simultaneously.

Then, a harsh sound like glass breaking resounded throughout the room. The magic circles vanished, leaving not a trace behind on the old walls.

Now, the phenomenon of magic being sapped away and the magic stones not working properly should be gone.

However, their relief was short lived. Suddenly, the ground under their feet started to crumble and, unable to keep her balance, Amelia tumbled to the ground.

“Eek!”

“Amelia!”

With the magic circles now gone, the magic preserving the building must have been removed as well. Due to that, the building, unable to withstand the long years of deterioration, was now collapsing. The walls were breaking apart and the ceiling was caving in.

Amelia exclaimed wordlessly.

She was so exhausted that she couldn’t even run away. At this rate, they would be buried alive. She shook with horror at the thought.

However, Sarge’s arms wrapped around her and his magic protected her.

“...I made it.”

Hearing his reassuring voice, Amelia opened her tightly shut eyes.

Amelia had thought they would both be buried beneath the collapsed building, but instead, they had been protected by Sarge’s barrier of magic. Now that the circles were gone, it seemed he could use magic as freely as he could in Bedeiht.

“Sarge...”

“Amelia, are you hurt?”

“No, I’m fine. Are you...”

“I’m fine too.”

After each confirmed the other was unharmed, they embraced.

“Oh good, you’re both okay,” Amelia heard a voice say in relief. She raised her head to see Alexis and Kaid running over to them.

“The magic circles...”

“We were able to get rid of them, but it looks like doing so caused the building to collapse.”

“I see. Well, Carloyd did say that as long as no one was harmed, we could do whatever we wanted with it, so this shouldn’t be a problem.”

Saying that, Alexis looked at the building, which had been reduced to a pile of rubble.

“Should we just leave it like this?” asked Alexis. Sarge shook his head as he continued to hold Amelia in his arms. Then, with just a light wave of the hand, Alexis made the pile of rubble disappear, leaving an empty plot of land.

“It’s morning now, but you two should sleep. Shall I ask if you can rest in the imperial castle? Or would it be better to rent a room in the capital?”

“I want to see how the city is doing, so an inn would be better,” Sarge responded. Alexis nodded, found lodging for them in the capital, and let the two of them rest there.

Amelia and Sarge’s rooms were next to each other, both protected by a magic barrier just in case. At some point, Liliane showed up at the inn to take care of Amelia.

“Prince Alexis called for me. I’ll be next to you the entire time, so please sleep easy.”

“...Okay,” Amelia said, then immediately crawled into bed. She was unsurprisingly worn out.

Alexis had put up a protective barrier, and Liliane was by her side. With those facts giving her a sense of security, Amelia was able to fall into a deep sleep.

When Amelia woke up, it was already close to midday and she was still in a daze. Liliane prepared some food for her.

“How is Sarge...?”

“Kaid said he is still sleeping.”

Sarge did not easily wake up once he fell asleep. It was possible he would not wake up until the evening.

“I think you should also sleep for a little longer, Lady Amelia,” Liliane told her. Amelia agreed.

“Right, I will.”

Naturally, she couldn’t say she had completely recovered.

“Alexis...”

“His Highness said he was going to go to Bedeiht for a moment to report to the king, and then he’ll be returning here.”

“He really is amazing...”

While Amelia and Sarge had been analyzing the magic circle, Alexis had spent the entire night keeping the door open with magic. Amelia admired how he was moving from place to place despite

having not rested.

“No, he actually did seem a bit tired. Though I haven’t seen him look tired in many, many years,” Liliane said, then laughed. She had been his classmate in the academy. However, no matter how hard Amelia tried, she couldn’t imagine Alexis looking tired.

After eating a light meal, Amelia went back to bed for a little longer at Liliane’s urging. Unable to fall asleep right away, she gazed out the window at the capital.

Now that the magic circles are gone, I no longer sense any magic here... And I’m sure the rain-producing magic tool should work normally now. But...

Those magic circles were likely the reason magic had disappeared from this country. They had gotten rid of those magic circles, but the issue still wasn’t completely resolved. At least, Amelia had a hunch that was the case.

Also, I can’t believe there were once people in the Beltz Empire who used dark magic.

However, since this nation had lost magic, there were undoubtedly no more dark mages here either. Even so, with some of those old buildings still standing, they would have to get rid of all of them, just like they had done with that magic circle.

At some point while she was thinking that, she fell asleep again.

Amelia slept deeply until the next morning and woke up feeling refreshed.

“Mm, that was a good sleep.”

All her exhaustion had gone away. After getting changed, she headed to the room where Alexis and Sarge were apparently waiting for her.

Oh, Julius is here?

Julius, who she had thought was staying behind in the kingdom, was also there. He too must have been called here by Alexis, just like Liliane was.

“Good morning,” she called out to the three of them. They turned to look at her.

“Oh, Amelia. Good morning. You look well,” Alexis greeted her with a bright smile. “Julius, Amelia’s here now, so that’s enough. Sarge has already repented.”

“...You’re too soft on him, brother.”

“I’d say the same goes for you.”

Apparently Julius had been scolding Sarge for doing something dangerous on his own.

“I know we’ve been relying on you a lot in regard to the crops and magical tools, Sarge, but this problem isn’t something you can solve on your own. I want you to rely on the rest of us, not just Amelia.

There should be something we can do too.”

Since Sarge had been entrusted with creating the tool, he must have felt that he had to fix it on his own too. However, not only Julius but Alexis, Est, and Amelia were always wanting to help him out. Just as Julius said, even if they couldn’t do what Sarge could do, they would be able to aid in some way.

Also, the issue at hand was related to magic circles and ancient magic language—neither of which was his specialty, even if he was knowledgeable about them. Amelia wanted to stand up for Sarge, but she also understood well what Julius was trying to say.

So, without interrupting, she just watched on.

“I know. It’s only because Amelia and Alec came that I was able to resolve things this time,” Sarge responded earnestly, having completely taken in his brother’s words. “But we still have things to do. The circles must be sending that accumulated magical energy somewhere. And I’m sure that has something to do with the state of the empire. We need to find it and put a stop to it.”

“The state of this empire?”

At Alexis’s question, Sarge shifted his gaze to look out the window.

“The reason that the empire is the only country on the continent that has seen rising temperatures must lie wherever the magic circles were sending that power. I believe they were set up during the violent international conflicts that occurred over a century ago.”

“You mean...”

Alexis and Julius looked at each other, their expressions growing severe.

That was the era when mages had mainly used their magic for fighting. Large-scale magic intended to annihilate enemies all at once was being rapidly developed, and each country suffered heavy losses.

They had plunged into a terrifyingly violent magic war, and knowing that if the war were to continue, they would all see even more damage, the leaders of each country had gathered together to reach an agreement. If those magic circles had been created at that time to gather whatever magic they could get their hands on and send it somewhere else, then their purpose could only be to power a magical weapon.

That can’t be...

Amelia folded her shaking hands over her chest and looked imploringly at Sarge.

“We still don’t know if it actually is a weapon,” he said, perhaps having sensed Amelia’s unease. “If it is a magic weapon, I don’t think anything massive could have gone undiscovered for so long. But considering the situation here in the empire, I don’t think it’s anything

good.”

Sarge went on to say that there were several accounts among the documents in the imperial castle’s reference room that led him to that conclusion.

“Temperatures continue to rise and magical energy is stolen away. There are records of that happening in the past too.”

Perhaps the mage who had made those magic circles had lost their life in battle, leaving behind only that weapon-like object.

If they supposed that the magic weapon had gone out of control after being continually supplied with an excess of power and had ended up affecting even the country’s climate, that would be a very terrifying thing.

“We should tell Carloyd about this too,” Alexis said after hearing Sarge’s explanation.

This problem concerned the Beltz Empire, after all.

“Brother, if I may,” Julius spoke up hesitantly. “If it’s such a formidable weapon, then there’s even a possibility the empire could use it to rule over this continent. Can’t we just simply get rid of it?”

Julius was suggesting it would be better to deal with the weapon quietly, without disclosing its existence.

“I think it’s lucky that this wasn’t discovered during the time of the previous emperor or the one before him,” Alexis said in response to his brother. “But knowing Carloyd, I’m sure he’ll immediately say to get rid of that dangerous thing. I have no doubts about that. That’s the type of man he is.”

“I understand that, but...”

Julius, knowing the solitary emperor’s tendency to be honest to a fault, must have felt hesitant about so readily revealing the existence of something that could induce another war between the nations.

“I understand your concern, Julius. But we are in the Beltz Empire, and we can’t destroy another nation’s property. I’m going to speak with Carloyd about it.”

Moreover, in order to find the magic weapon—whose location they didn’t know—they needed Carloyd’s permission and help. Sarge and Amelia agreed with what Alexis said.

Then, finally, Julius also assented.

Afterwards, they all went to the imperial castle. They told Carloyd they wanted to speak with him alone, and he immediately consented.

“Is this regarding the old buildings in the capital?” Carloyd asked, having left behind his aides and guards to listen to what they had to say.

If Alois and Lyriann had been around, they would have taken part as well, but the two of them were currently away from the castle on some official business.

“That’s right. Inside that building, there were several magic circles indiscriminately absorbing magic energy,” Alexis told him. Then, using reenactment magic, he showed Carloyd the magic circles that had been drawn inside the building.

“This looks...very ominous indeed,” said Carloyd, frowning as he looked at the projection.

“The reason our rain-producing magic tools were malfunctioning was that these magic circles were even absorbing the power of the magic stones. The circles were still working normally—so well that it’s hard to believe they were created over a century ago.”

“And these magic circles were also the reason that building collapsed?”

“That’s right. Sarge and Amelia dismantled the magic circles. The building must have collapsed because the magic preserving it also disappeared.”

Carloyd accepted Alexis’s explanation with a nod.

“I see... Thank you for getting rid of those circles at the risk of your own safety. I don’t understand magic myself, but even I could sense those were sinister, terrifying things. If you had left them be, something terrible might have happened down the line,” Carloyd said, looking sincerely relieved as he expressed his gratitude to Amelia and Sarge.

“That’s right. The magic circles are what caused Sarge’s magical tools to malfunction, and the situation could have turned out even worse.”

Alexis had been addressing Carloyd brightly, as if he were speaking with a close friend, but suddenly his expression changed.

“We have reason to believe that the circles were sending the power they gathered to another location. Sarge says that the source of the rise in temperature, which has led to desertification throughout this country, can be found wherever that magic was being transmitted.”

Carloyd stood up as if he had received a terrible shock. He turned his intense gaze to Sarge, pressing him to give more information.

Unflinchingly, Sarge nodded, then launched into an explanation of the situation surrounding the empire.

“In the documents left behind here regarding the history of magic in the empire, there are accounts of a fire-breathing dragon residing near the capital, and also reports that the region near the dragon’s lair is hotter than other areas, with the temperatures rising each year.”

“A dragon?” Carloyd echoed dubiously.

Sarge explained that it likely wasn’t a real dragon but something like a magical tool that was metaphorically referred to as a dragon.

“The mages of the Beltz Empire realized that the magical tool was

dangerous enough to harm the surrounding land and tried to put a stop to it. However, it seems that was impossible for them to do.”

Sarge explained that many accounts described the magical tool as a relic of an era of magic wars and said that if anyone drew near it, it would completely sap away their magic power and eventually lead to their death.

“Is it really possible for one magical tool to have such an effect on the climate of the entire empire?”

It was more natural for Carloyd, who was unfamiliar with magic, to consider the empire’s problem as an issue with the climate rather than the influence of magic.

“The use of large-scale magic was more common in the past than it is now. And yet the tool was probably not as powerful back then as it is now. Considering how much time has passed with the circles continuously absorbing magic, it’s not strange for things to have reached this point.”

“I see,” Carloyd said. He seemed to take Sarge’s words seriously. “Why would the emperors of the past leave something like that be?”

“In order to protect the secret, the contents of some documents were concealed using magic. Once those who could undo that magic passed away, that information was also lost.”

Eventually, the area being affected by the rising temperatures had also expanded, and people had begun to believe it was the fault of the climate rather than the influence of the magical tool. And in regard to magic power, the number of mages declined, with the result that fewer and fewer people could feel their power being drained away.

“There may also be people alive now who had at one point had a meager amount of magic that the magic circles completely stole away. They must never have learned that they had any magic power at all, much less elemental magic.”

This was naturally a shocking story. Carloyd fell into silence until he eventually exhaled a deep sigh.

“With the magic circles gone, that tool should also stop working, right?”

“At some point. But I’m not certain that it really is a magical tool, and considering it’s been supplied with magic for over a century, it’s also possible it’ll take years before its effects cease completely. In the meantime, if the temperature continues to rise, I’m not sure the rain-producing magical tool will be enough to combat it.”

Sarge had just said that the object was likely a magical tool and had made no reference to it possibly being a weapon. However, Carloyd had managed to surmise that anyway, considering the time period in which it was created and the number of magic circles that were gathering magic.

“If it’s that dangerous, then we need to do whatever we can to eliminate it. Is that possible?”

In response to Carloyd’s question, Alexis gave a forceful nod.

“Yes. Like Sarge said, it’s dangerous to leave it alone. We don’t know where it is or what form it takes, but we must find and destroy it by any means necessary.”

“I’m sorry to trouble you with all the problems of this country,” Carloyd said, bowing his head. But as Alexis said, this was far too dangerous to neglect.

Following their discussion, they decided that Alexis and Julius—with Alois as their guide—would comb over the imperial capital to locate the magical tool-like object. Since it had been created so many years ago, not even reenactment magic could reveal its location, so all they could do was take their time and search.

“Sarge and Amelia, go back home for now. You must be tired after removing those magic circles. Take your time to recuperate and prepare for when we find what we’re looking for.”

“Okay,” Amelia responded immediately. She had already recovered, but she didn’t feel she could help in the search even if she did stay.

More importantly, Emperor Carloyd had given them special permission to take some old magical documents with them, so it was probably better for her to analyze those and gather information on magical weapons.

Sarge hesitated for a bit, but after being rushed by Julius, he reluctantly assented. He must have felt disinclined to leave the empire now. However, Sarge, who always took on everything himself, also needed to take a break.

Before the end of the day, the two of them, as well as Liliane, would be returning to Bedeiht.

“Once we find something out, I’ll let you know. So just wait patiently until then,” Alexis warned Sarge before sending them back to Bedeiht using transportation magic.

Chapter 5: The Same Flowers as That Day

Alexis had transported all three of them without even using a magic circle.

“He’s amazing,” Amelia muttered, impressed by the way they had returned to Bedeiht in an instant. She instinctively took a deep breath of the chilly air. Unsurprisingly, she was most comfortable in this kingdom’s climate.

“You’re right. It’s because of him that I can focus on my research,” Sarge responded. Then he looked at her and said, “Amelia, thank you for coming for me. If you hadn’t lifted the magic locking that door, I would still be trapped in there.”

“I’m happy I was able to help you,” she responded. She was very glad they had been able to return home together like this.

After learning that the two of them had returned, Marie, Sophia, and Est came to greet them.

“Welcome back,” said Marie, and even though Amelia thought she had rested enough, Marie’s gentle voice made her grow weak and almost sink to the floor.

“You had a difficult time, didn’t you? Don’t do anything besides rest today,” Sophia said in recognition of what they had endured.

“But Julius and Alexis are still in the empire...”

“It’s all right. Those two are both strong, so it would take a lot to cause them any harm.”

As Amelia recalled how active Alexis had been without showing the least bit of fatigue, she felt that very well might be true.

“Besides, Sarge looks a bit unwell. We should let him rest,” Sophia whispered to Amelia, who looked at Sarge with a start.

Indeed, before Amelia had hurried over to the empire, he had been trapped in that building for three days. It was doubtful he had spent the entire time just keeping still. He had likely been trying everything he could think of to open the door or deal with the magic circles. They had then done the hard work of getting rid of the magic circles, so there was little chance he had recovered after just one day of rest.

“Have you already forgotten what Julius told you about entrusting what you can to him?” Est asked Sarge in exasperation after he refused to rest because he wanted to find the magic weapon as quickly

as possible. “Furthermore, I’ve been studying a bit about ancient magic. Leave those documents you brought back with me and go to bed.”

“Sarge, didn’t you promise me you wouldn’t push yourself?” Amelia tacked on. Appearing to have finally given in, Sarge retired to his bedroom.

Amelia’s sense of relief did not last long, though. Next, it was her turn to be told the same thing by Sophia and Marie.

“All right, Amelia. You too. You’re going to be busy from here on, so you need to rest properly while you can.”

“Okay.”

Although they were fussing over Sarge and Amelia, it seemed likely that Sophia and Marie were truly worried about Alexis and Julius, who were both back in the Beltz Empire. Amelia decided to take advantage of their kindness for now and obediently went to her room.

With Emperor Carloyd’s approval, they had brought back several documents from the Beltz Empire. Est would take care of looking over those documents.

In the past, there had been a time when Est was even weaker than he was now and had spent most of his time in his room. During that time, he had apparently done nothing but read old books about magic and ancient magic language.

Before Amelia started attending the academy, she had also read the same types of books during the winters, when she couldn’t be outside on the farm, in the hopes that what she learned about magic would be helpful for her family’s domain. She could probably talk about magic with Est too from now on. She was happy to have found an interest she had in common with the man who would be her brother-in-law.

But still... Amelia thought as she gazed up at the ceiling, lying on her bed in her own familiar room.

The issue at hand was so serious that it required the hard work of all four princes—Alexis and Julius in the Beltz Empire, and Est and Sarge in Bedeiht.

That thought was a little frightening, but she also felt secure that everything would be all right with the four of them working together.

“Right, I should sleep while I can.”

She had so many friends she could rely on, so she decided she would let them take care of what they could and get herself back to top health. With that thought, she focused on recovering and not doing anything that day, just like she’d been told to do.

And so, the next day, she was back to feeling completely normal.

Amelia had already rested quite a bit in the empire, after all, and

furthermore, she had always been very active on her family's farmland, so she was surprisingly strong despite her small frame.

Amelia headed to breakfast and greeted Sophia and Marie. "Good morning. Thank you for letting me take it easy yesterday."

Est also came by a little late, but Sarge did not show up.

"Where's Sarge...?"

"Oh, he's fine. Even though I confiscated all his materials to make him rest, apparently he ended up thinking a lot instead and couldn't sleep," Est said with a wry smile, having gone to check on his brother before breakfast. It wasn't surprising that Sarge would have so much to think about given the knowledge he had accumulated without even needing to look through his documents.

"It looks like he finally fell asleep in the early hours of the morning, so let's let him rest a little more."

"Okay."

After Amelia had breakfast with the three of them, she and Est went to the library together to analyze the materials she and Sarge had brought back.

"The existence of dark magic is a story that has been passed down through generations of the Bedeiht royal family," Est explained to her, having found mentions of dark magic in the documents.

"Oh, is that so?"

"I heard dark magic users died out during the magic war of over a century ago. But I think those magic circles in the Beltz Empire were undoubtedly the work of dark magic."

Perhaps because it was magic that had been lost, it had only been told to the members of the royal family of Bedeiht, who were light magic users.

"Yes, I think so too. They were very sinister-looking things."

Those magic circles had forcibly stolen away others' magic power. Amelia was even more keenly amazed now that they had been able to get rid of so many of them. She was sure it was because Sarge, a wielder of light magic, had been there with her.

"I suspect the same goes for the magic weapon that was being supplied with that power. Even when mages pass away, vestiges of their magic remain. Those weapons are unnecessary in today's world. We should get rid of all of them."

Est spoke about how glad he was that Carloyd, as the emperor of the Beltz Empire, did not desire war.

Magic had been lost in the Beltz Empire, and the fact that wielders of dark magic had once existed there was not mentioned in common books. Amelia had sensed that even Carloyd was unconsciously fearful of magic.

Having such a strong, uncontrollable power right at hand was a

very terrifying thing.

It was considerably difficult to understand the documents relating to magic that had been left behind in the Beltz Empire, as Sarge had said, and some things were even difficult for Est and Amelia to interpret, even though they both had a good grasp on ancient magic language.

“We really do need Sarge’s help here, don’t we? Amelia, could you go check on him?”

“Hm?” Amelia, who had been focused on trying to understand a certain passage, looked up in surprise when Est asked her that out of the blue. “Check on him... Um, do you mean...in his room?”

Amelia had always met with Sarge in the library or elsewhere, and they had never visited each other’s rooms.

Est laughed and nodded at Amelia’s frazzled response.

“That’s right. You’re his fiancée, so I didn’t think it would be a problem.”

Amelia would likely be able to see an unexpected side of him, one she’d never seen before.

After Est told her that with a cheerful smile, Amelia couldn’t help but be curious. Besides, she was just going to see how he was doing. Telling herself that, Amelia nodded and, despite her nervousness, headed for Sarge’s room.

His room was very close to the library. Nervously, she knocked on the door, and a voice answered from within.

“Um, Sarge?”

“Amelia?” he responded in surprise as he opened the door, seeming like he hadn’t imagined Amelia would come to his room.

“Prince Est asked me to come check on you.”

“He did?” He seemed to think that was an unexpected move on Est’s part, but he showed Amelia into his room all the same. “I’m sorry, I was fast asleep. I can’t believe what time it is already,” he said as he hastily tried to fix his slightly tousled golden hair. Amelia unintentionally giggled, thinking that gesture was somewhat cute.

So this is his room...

It was filled with books and documents and didn’t have a very lived-in feel; in fact, it almost felt like a library. There were several pots of flowers by the window, including some that were blooming out of season. Sarge must have made those bloom with magic.

Amelia felt it was rude to look around his room too much, but she ended up losing out to her curiosity, and her gaze wandered.

“Ah...”

On the wall hung a single painting.

It was a landscape painting, somewhat large in size. Amelia felt she recognized the scenery and then realized that it was the Lenia

domain.

“Sarge, this is...”

It was from last year.

Due to their prolonged diplomatic mission disrupting their summer holiday, Amelia and Sarge had taken another break in place of the first and had gone to visit the Lenia domain. While they were there, he had invited her to walk around the farmland together. That scenery was depicted in this painting.

“It’s the Lenia domain, from that day, isn’t it?”

“Yeah.”

Sarge nodded, and then, looking a bit embarrassed, touched the painting Amelia was looking at.

“I wanted to capture the view we saw that day and give it form, so I tried painting it, and this is how it turned out.”

“*You* painted this?” Amelia asked. Surprise made her voice louder than she’d intended. She’d had no idea that he painted. This must have been what Est had meant about seeing an unexpected side of him.

“I did. Since long ago, I’ve always drawn invaluable plants I couldn’t bring back home with me. Usually I just do a quick sketch, and I had never painted something as big as this before, but I really wanted to preserve that scenery.”

He must have been slowly working on this painting whenever he found time to take a break from his work. The gentle hues made Amelia understand just how much he cherished that scenery and the time they had spent together there.

That thought made her so happy, tears started to spill from her eyes in spite of her best efforts to contain them. As she was moved to tears, Sarge gently pulled her in close to him.

“Once everything is over, I want to walk through those fields with you again,” she said.

“Me too. We need to do our best to resolve the issue with the magic weapon for that reason too.”

The two nestled close together as they gazed at the painting of the Lenia domain.

When they returned to the library, Est kindly greeted them.

The three of them read through the documents, but the only accounts of the magic weapon merely expressed fear of its dark magic, so they weren’t able to identify its location from the information they had. Alexis and Julius, who were journeying all over in search of the weapon, had yet to obtain any significant information either.

“Maybe it’s not very big, then,” Est said. Amelia had the same thought.

While the weapon likely did hold some frightening power, there

was a possibility the object itself was small. It could also have had concealment magic cast on it.

It would not be easy to find.

However, the fact remained that the increasing temperatures were centered on the capital. The weapon was undoubtedly in that vicinity.

"If we assume the weapon is also at the root of the empire's abnormal weather, we might be able to figure something out by looking at the changes in temperature over time."

Unfortunately, there was no pertinent information recorded in the documents on magic that they had analyzed so far.

In that case, they needed to search from a different angle.

With that thought, Amelia came up with the idea that they might be able to identify the location by looking at the rising temperatures.

"True. It's been a problem in the empire for a long time, so there must have been people looking into it closely. Let's ask Emperor Carloyd if any detailed data still exists," Sarge agreed.

They had decided to head to the Beltz Empire at once when Est spoke up to suggest he would come with them too.

"Thanks to Amelia, magic power isn't being drained away anymore. So there shouldn't be any problem with me going, right?"

"But..."

Amelia was naturally worried about whether it was all right for all four princes to be out of the country at the same time, but Est told her that wouldn't be an issue.

"Linus is here now."

The newborn Linus was the next in line for the throne after Alexis. Est said that even if something were to happen, there would be no problem as long as Linus remained here, since the baby was without a doubt a wielder of light magic. They were unable to dissuade Est, who was surprisingly stubborn, and even the king gave his approval. Thus, the three of them went to the Beltz Empire together.

Sarge was worried about Est, but the latter was as composed as ever even after enduring the long-distance transportation magic.

At the imperial castle, Alexis, Julius, and Carloyd welcomed their arrival.

"I can't believe you came too, Est. Do you feel okay?" Alexis asked worriedly.

Est smiled and said he was fine.

"More importantly, we need to hurry and find where that magical tool is."

They searched to see if there was any detailed data recorded on increasing temperatures from around the time when desertification first became a concern. With Alois and Lyriann helping too, they were able to pinpoint the time period.

“Let’s look more closely at the records from this year.”

At Est’s suggestion, they investigated those records in even greater detail.

“Wait...”

Among those records, something caught Amelia’s attention.

There had once been a small town right next to the imperial capital. The land in that town had turned to desert with incredible speed even compared to other areas, and it had very suddenly become uninhabitable, after which the town itself was finally wiped off the map.

“Let’s try searching that town,” Sarge said after Amelia showed him what she’d found.

Identifying the whereabouts of the town did not take much time.

“Julius, Kaid, and I will go check out the area where the town used to be. The rest of you, stay behind in the castle,” said Alexis. Then, accompanied by Julius and Kaid, he headed to that area.

All they could do at the castle was wait, so they searched through the other records in case Alexis and the others didn’t find anything. However, no other area had seen such drastic desertification.

“I think it’s definitely the area my brothers are headed to,” Sarge said. Amelia nodded in agreement.

As he had predicted, Alexis and the others returned with something that looked like a slightly large jewel.

“It wasn’t hard to find the place, since it was in a much more desertified state than anywhere else. Est, Sarge, I’ll leave this to you to examine.”

Est and Sarge both nodded at Alexis’s words.

After analyzing the jewel, they found that it was unquestionably the magical tool that the circles had been supplying with magic.

“I thought that the desertification had come about because the magical weapon had been supplied with too much power, but in actuality, it seems this weapon was made specifically for the purpose of causing desertification.”

Sarge and Est reported the results of their analysis to Carloyd, Alois, and Lyriann, as well as to Alexis, Julius, and Amelia.

“Its purpose was to cause desertification?” asked Carloyd. “What do you mean?”

“This tool could be hidden underground in an enemy nation, and as long as it was supplied with magic power, it would turn the land into a desert,” said Sarge. “It was likely a starvation tactic.”

If a land’s soil could no longer support crops, then it would soon become uninhabitable. And naturally, it would gradually become impossible for the people who lived there to fight in a war.

But ironically, before burying that weapon in an enemy nation,

the dark mage who made it passed away, and the weapon was left behind in the Beltz Empire. The reason the drought had grown more severe after Carloyd used the rain-producing magical tool was that the weapon had been activated upon absorbing the power of the magic stones.

“...So the desertification of this land wasn’t an issue with the weather but simply the consequence of this nation’s own actions?”

No one could respond to Carloyd’s statement, which was uttered in a tone filled with bitterness.

The dark mage must have been a subordinate of the emperor of the time and had created this weapon under his orders. Thus, if they eliminated the magic weapon, they would likely halt the progress of desertification. Even so, it would take a very long time for the exhausted land to return to its original state.

Sarge was the one to break the heavy silence. “Our magical tools should now work normally, though. The magic circles forcibly stealing away power are also gone. And from now on children may be born with magic power in this nation too.”

The past could not be changed.

And the current situation was also severe.

However, the future was filled with hope.

Carloyd took in Sarge’s words and nodded, his eyes filled with resolve.

“As the emperor, I will devote my life to restoring this land. I’m very grateful for all of the support the Kingdom of Bedeiht has provided.”

“We’ve been involved thus far. We’ll continue to help from here on,” Alexis said brightly to dispel the somber mood in the room. In response, Carloyd’s face softened a bit.

Carloyd might have been a solitary emperor, but he was no longer alone. Alois and Lyriann were also by his side. The path ahead would be difficult, but if anyone could walk it successfully, he could.

Carloyd was hesitant to make an official announcement about the whole matter. However, given the current state of affairs, it was best not to invite distrust and discontent towards the empire and the emperor. Having been told as much by Alexis and Alois, Carloyd gave in.

Amelia also felt that was the best course of action.

Neither the dark mage who had developed the weapon nor the emperor who had ordered its creation had intended to transform their own country into a desert.

Amelia was horrified at the thought of the tool actually being used as a weapon. Their target had likely been the country that bordered them on the other side of the precipitous mountain range, the

Kingdom of Janaki.

Janaki had always had thriving farmland and exported crops in large volumes. If that nation had been turned into a desert, then the power balance on the continent would have changed dramatically.

With the problem resolved, Amelia and Sarge returned home to Bedeiht. There, they grew busy with analyzing the crop data that had been sent in from each region of the kingdom. The crop yields were higher than they had expected, so there shouldn't be any issues on that front.

Sarge seemed to be enjoying himself more while he was going through the agricultural data than he did when he was analyzing magic. His true disposition was that of a botanist after all.

After this year's harvest was over, he experimented with casting growth promotion magic not on fertilizer but directly on the plant seeds. Although infusing a seed with magic might have seemed simple, it was actually quite difficult to fine-tune the magic used. But knowing him, Amelia was certain he would succeed at it eventually.

Amelia, meanwhile, was fairly busy with the preparations for her fast-approaching graduation and marriage ceremonies. Her wedding dress was complete, and after being captivated by how beautiful it looked, she alternated between blushing and turning pale when she imagined herself actually wearing it. Seeing her like that, Marie laughed.

"Come on, it obviously suits you. It's a dress made specifically for you, after all," Marie told her.

But Amelia remembered her friend saying her own dress was too flashy for her. When she pointed that out, Marie remembered too and giggled.

Not only Sophia and the queen but even Amelia's mother came to visit her in the royal capital to give her advice. The day was steadily approaching, filling Amelia's heart with anxiety and anticipation. She was anxious about whether she could become someone fit to be a princess.

However, Amelia wasn't alone. Sophia and Marie had come before her, and Chloe would come after her. Just as the four princes were working together to support this kingdom, the four women would work together to support their husbands in doing so.

Spring followed a shorter-than-usual winter.

For Amelia, it was the season in which she had met Sarge, so she held a deep emotional attachment to it.

That spring, Amelia graduated from the Royal Academy of Magic.

Although she would no longer be attending as a student, she would probably continue commuting to this place as a member of the Royal Magic Research Institute.

Her cousin Sol and his fiancée Meena were now third-years. And Chloe, who was the same age as Amelia but had decided to enroll as a first-year, was also now a third-year.

Last winter, it had finally been announced officially that Chloe was Second Prince Est's fiancée and a princess from Janaki. The two of them had originally been planning to hold their engagement party in the autumn, but it ended up being postponed to the winter due to the turmoil in the Beltz Empire.

There were some people who were shocked to learn that Chloe, who they had thought was just a foreign exchange student, was a princess of Janaki and moreover would be marrying into the kingdom's royal family. However, the students of the academy no longer treated others differently based on their status.

I'm glad. The academy has also changed gradually.

Amelia felt relieved to learn that.

Furthermore, because interactions with foreign nations were becoming more common, some people were knowledgeable about the affairs and royal families of other countries and had realized Chloe was a princess. However, since it hadn't been publicly announced, they had thankfully understood not to disclose that information to other people.

Chloe spoke happily about how she had been inundated with words of congratulations after the official announcement.

That spring, Est officially became the academy's headmaster. He took an active role in interacting with the students and listening to their opinions and incorporating ideas he thought seemed viable. It seemed the academy would continue to improve even more from here on out.

Although Amelia had endured a lot of hardship, in the end she was able to graduate with a smile.

After the graduation ceremony ended, Amelia walked around the academy alone.

First she came to the venue that had hosted the new student welcome party, where she had first met Sarge. She remembered that this was where she had first danced with him.

Amelia loved to dance, but since her former fiancé, Reese, disliked dancing, she had seldom had the opportunity.

A smile slowly filled her face as she recalled how much fun she'd had. She knew she would be able to dance with Sarge more often from now on, but she would never forget that day.

I also remember bumping into him around the corner of the school building.

She had sprained her ankle, so he had picked her up and carried her.

That was also when I met Julius...

She remembered how Julius had looked when he'd been at a loss as to how to deal with Sarge, who was always behaving however he liked.

Sarge no longer made other people chase after him like he used to. And after the incident in the Beltz Empire, he'd even started consulting with Est about magic. He still got carried away with his research and lost track of time, but since Amelia occasionally did the same, she couldn't scold him too harshly.

But I need to be as mindful as I possibly can.

Next was the fountain in the courtyard, where she had first met Marie.

At that time, her bag, which was filled with the documents she had worked hard to create for Sarge, had been thrown in the fountain. She had been more shocked at her classmates' malice than she had been sad about her efforts going to waste. However, amid all that was Marie, who had declared Amelia's classmates to be in the wrong. She was still her best friend.

Lastly was the back garden, where she and Sarge had planted various herbs and flowers. Amelia had thought there would no longer be anything here, but there were many beautiful white flowers blooming in the garden. The sight took her breath away.

"Did he plant these?"

Hardly anyone came to this garden. And ever since Sarge graduated, Amelia hadn't been coming here either.

So why...

These white flowers were ones Sarge had selectively bred. Had he come here, thinking Amelia might visit this place of memories, and made these flowers bloom for her graduation?

"I can't believe he would give me such a lovely graduation present..."

Amelia softly touched one of the white flowers and smiled.

Amelia's wedding to the fourth prince of the Kingdom of Bedeiht was held shortly after her graduation from the academy.

The weather that day was pleasant. The sky was blue and perfectly clear, so much so that it was painful on Amelia's slightly sleep-deprived eyes.

"Honestly, Amelia, don't tell me you got caught up in your research again?" asked Marie worriedly. She had come to Amelia's room early in the morning to help her with preparations. "Even the night before your wedding?"

"N-No, I wasn't," Amelia said, shaking her head. "I wanted to get to sleep early last night, so I actually went straight to bed after dinner."

"That was probably a bit *too* early."

"But then I couldn't fall asleep at all..."

The thought of finally marrying Sarge had brought so many memories to mind that she'd ended up unable to sleep. Amelia told Marie she was still awake when the sky started to brighten, and the latter sighed.

"In that case, you should have come to my room. I heard it's become popular recently to have a sleepover at a friend's house the night before your wedding."

"You're right. I should have done that."

If Amelia had had a sleepover with the usual bunch, she likely wouldn't have spent the night so nervous and unable to sleep until morning.

"We can do that next time."

"...Next time?" Marie echoed, appalled.

"That's not what I meant," Amelia backtracked hastily. "I'm not talking about me; I'm talking about Chloe and Prince Est's wedding next summer."

She and Chloe were the same age, and they had become very close, so they now referred to each other without titles.

Next summer, Chloe would marry Est and officially become a member of this kingdom's royal family. Since the princess had also been through a lot, Amelia suspected that she, too, would be unable to sleep the night before her wedding.

"Oh, of course. You scared me. I was wondering why on earth you would say that on your wedding day."

"Sarge is the only one for me..." Amelia said, her face turning a bright shade of red.

Marie giggled at her, then continued, "But you're right. Since we went through the trouble of having my custom-made bed brought all the way to the castle, we need to have sleepovers every now and then, don't we?"

Could they really call it a sleepover if most of them were already living in the royal castle? Amelia thought about it for a little while but then came to the conclusion that the only important thing was how they felt about it, not the formalities.

"There's going to be a party tonight after the ceremony, so it's going to be a long day. Will you be okay?"

"Yes, I definitely will be," Amelia responded with a smile. Although she had certainly not gotten enough sleep, she had been anticipating this day for a long time.

Starting from that morning, Amelia had spent many hours carefully getting herself ready.

Her wedding dress had been thought out thoroughly by Sophia

and the queen, her soon-to-be mother-in-law, to suit Amelia's small frame. It was an adorable yet elegant design, and when she had tried it on for a fitting, Marie and Chloe had complimented her on how good it looked.

Amelia felt it was much too lovely a dress for her, but what she was really concerned about was whether Sarge would like it.

Amelia felt that Sarge loved her mainly because he liked who she was on the inside. They shared the same interests, like magic and botany, and they were similar in the way they forgot about their surroundings and became engrossed in what they were doing. They felt comfortable being together.

Since they would be spending many years together from here on, this sort of relationship was sure to make both of them happy.

But at least for today, I want him to think I'm beautiful. I want to put all my effort into getting dressed up for him, and have him see me like that...

That had been her thought last night, but then morning had arrived without her having slept much. Amelia lamented the fact that it would now be difficult to achieve the look she'd wanted, but the castle maids with their impressive skill dressed her up beautifully.

"Wow..." Amelia exclaimed in astonishment as she looked at herself in the mirror. Marie laughed.

"You're right about that. I almost thought you had magic cast on you."

Marie seemed to be at the point of saying that Amelia had always been beautiful, but that wasn't what Amelia was concerned about. What was important to her was whether she looked more beautiful than she usually did.

Amelia's father and mother, who had traveled here from the countryside, also came to visit her in her bridal suite and were moved to tears at the sight of their daughter in her wedding dress.

"I caused you a lot of trouble, Amelia. I'm sorry."

Amelia did feel that she deserved that apology from her father, but she told herself that it was thanks to him that she was happy now.

"Father, mother. Thank you for everything you've done for me. I'm sorry I won't be inheriting the Lenia domain."

"You don't need to worry about that, Amelia. You're taking on a much bigger responsibility now," her mother told her kindly before gathering her into a gentle embrace. "Besides, as long as you are happy, I have nothing more to say. Please come home to visit once in a while."

"I will. Thank you."

Her father started bawling, and her mother had to usher him out of the bridal suite as she scolded him.

As Amelia's parents, they would have to introduce themselves in various places. They were merely country nobles, but their daughter was becoming a princess. She felt she was causing them more trouble. Nevertheless, not only her mother but even her father told her with a smile that it wasn't a burden at all, as long as their daughter was happy.

Sol and Meena also came to see her.

"You look so pretty, big sister," said Meena, who had taken to calling Amelia her big sister.

Next year, after graduating from the academy, Sol would be adopted by Amelia's parents and become her younger brother. There had been many discussions of the matter, but since Sol had siblings, everyone had decided that this was the best thing to do.

When Sol was adopted, he would become a full member of the Lenia family. No one would be able to interfere with his succession. Since the Lenia family and the royal family would become relatives through Amelia's marriage, the procedure for Sol's succession would apparently become complicated. However, this way, Meena would become Amelia's sister-in-law, and Kaid would become her brother-in-law, which meant Amelia would also be related to Kaid's future wife, Liliane.

All of our sleepover members will become relatives.

Their tradition would no longer be a sleepover among friends but a regular family gathering. Amelia laughed to herself at that thought, but she felt that being related to her dear friends was a very happy thing.

"Thank you. Do you think Sarge will like it too?"

Someone like Meena, who was very upfront about her feelings, was sure to give her an honest opinion. When Amelia asked her question expecting that, Meena nodded several times.

"Of course he will. He's going to be enchanted by you, I'm sure of it," she said with certainty. Amelia sighed in relief.

While she was waiting anxiously for the ceremony to begin, Sarge came into her bridal suite. She gazed in admiration at him in his formal attire, and his eyes were directed right back at her.

"U-Um..." she stammered reflexively, thinking she should say something, but no words came out.

"Uh..."

"Amelia."

She felt a warm sensation on her face. Sarge had placed a gentle hand against her cheek.

"You look beautiful. You are more beautiful than anyone else."

Amelia wanted to be the most important person to him, and he had remembered her telling him that. She had told herself she

couldn't cry before the ceremony, but her tears flowed automatically, streaming over the hand that Sarge had placed on her cheek.

"You're the most important person to me too. From now and forever," Amelia said, smiling through her tears. "I never imagined I could have such a happy marriage."

"It must have been fate that brought you together."

The queen's words came to her mind.

Amelia also believed without any doubt that it had been fate that the two of them had met.

Many people were in attendance at their wedding. Even Lyriann had come from the Beltz Empire as the emperor's representative. She looked very beautiful in her formal wear, and some people were suspicious of her features, which were uncharacteristic of people from the Beltz Empire, but then Alexis officially introduced her as a relative.

"Lyriann is probably going to become the empress of the Beltz Empire," Sarge whispered to Amelia, who had been surprised that Alexis had disclosed Lyriann's lineage. That must have been precisely why he had done so.

Understandably, he kept Alois's identity a secret, but Lyriann had decided she wanted to stop hiding and appear in the political sphere.

Lyriann is related to the royal family of Bedeiht, after all...

If Carloyd married her, then he would also become family to Alexis and the others. Plus, he and Lyriann would likely have a child who could wield magic.

From what Amelia could see, it seemed like Lyriann also felt affection for Carloyd.

For Carloyd and the empire, Lyriann's existence offered hope.

As many people watched and celebrated, Amelia and Sarge vowed their everlasting love to each other. On Amelia's finger was a wedding ring of Sarge's own creation. It was a magical tool, but the design was beautiful.

It was a gold ring inlaid with an emerald and a sapphire.

Amelia knew that Sarge had been working on this magical tool in his spare moments for a long time. He had poured all his effort into making several prototypes, with the result that this magical tool was the best it could be. Then he had given it to Amelia as her wedding ring.

After they sealed their vows with a kiss—the first time they had touched lips—Amelia blushed a bright red, and Sarge affectionately pulled her in close to him.



After a short break, Amelia busied herself getting ready for the reception that would be held that evening. Sophia and the queen were both struggling quite a lot to decide whether Amelia's dress for the party should be white or green like Sarge's eyes. But then they decided that, since her engagement party dress had been white, she should wear green for tonight. The mature design of the subdued jade-green dress was entirely different from that of her wedding dress, which had looked more sweet and cute.

"You really are a princess now too, Amelia," Sophia and Marie both told her cheerily when they saw her finished look.

"It seems okay, right? Does it look good on me?" Amelia asked, looking in the mirror several times to check.

"Definitely. But the hem of the skirt is a bit long, so be careful when you dance."

"Yes, I will."

Even though she had been explicitly warned, during her first dance with Sarge at the start of the party, she accidentally stepped on the hem of her skirt and nearly fell over.

"Eek!"

Sarge, however, held her up securely. Amelia grasped his arms and sighed in relief. She certainly did not want to fall over while dancing at her own wedding reception.

"Have you gotten a bit taller, Sarge?"

She noticed that in order to meet his eyes, she had to tilt her head back farther than she had when she'd first danced with him at the new student welcome party. Sarge nodded happily at her question.

"I did. I'm as tall as Julius now."

Now that he mentioned it, she realized he was right. She couldn't stop herself from looking between Julius and Sarge to compare them, and Julius, who noticed, stared at her in confusion.

"I really haven't changed much at all," she lamented as she looked at herself. She hadn't grown any taller or more mature looking even after graduating from the academy. Sarge clasped her hands.

"I like you the way you are, Amelia. Your strong sense of curiosity, your humility, your ability to concentrate, and your kindness, which prevents you from ignoring people in trouble—and most of all, your unbreakable strength even when others treat you wrongly. I love everything about you."

"Sarge..."

He normally kept his thoughts to himself, so she would never have imagined that he might say something like that.

Before the wedding ceremony, she had felt she wanted him to be enamored with how she looked. She'd hoped he would tell her she

looked beautiful. But now she knew that being loved for who she was as a person, for being herself, made her incredibly happy and was a hard thing to come by.

“I love you too. Meeting you has brought light back into my life.”

With his shining golden hair and his light magic, Sarge was a light that would continue to illuminate her life.

Sarge smiled happily at Amelia’s words.

The fourth prince was often likened to a doll because of his customary composed expression and detached demeanor, so when a full smile filled his face, the surrounding crowd began to murmur in surprise. However, Sarge’s close relatives knew that this was how he always was with Amelia.

After their first dance ended, Amelia left Sarge’s side for a bit to chat with Marie, Chloe, Meena, and a few of her colleagues from the laboratory. While she was thanking them all with a smile for their words of congratulations, she noticed someone was peering over at them from nearby.

“Ah...” she said reflexively as she caught sight of the familiar face.

Then the other girl appeared to muster up the courage to speak up. “U-Um... Lady Amelia, congratulations on your wedding. I...I wanted to apologize to you...”

“Erica?”

It was Erica, who had resided in the room next to Amelia’s when she lived in the academy dorm. The two of them had started getting close, and Amelia had thought they could become friends, but after hearing the rumors about Amelia that Reese had spread, Erica had grown fearful of becoming involved with her and had abandoned her. Amelia remembered how much more shocked she had felt being treated with disdain by Erica, whom she had interacted with on friendly terms, than when she was mistreated by people she didn’t even know.

But...

It was brave of Erica to apologize to her like this. Amelia knew it must have taken a lot of nerve to speak to her while she was with Marie and Chloe. Perhaps Erica had been regretting what she’d done even after Amelia enrolled in the Special A class and stopped attending normal classes.

That was why Amelia replied to her with a smile. “Thank you,” she said. “Don’t worry about what’s in the past anymore.”

Of course, Amelia didn’t feel that the two of them could become friends again, but she also didn’t want Erica to continue holding on to her regret forever.

“You’re too nice, Amelia,” Marie told her in exasperation after they moved to another room to take a quick break.

Amelia didn't say anything; she just turned to her friend and smiled.

Amelia herself had moments when she was jealous of others or felt negatively towards them. But when she thought about how she wanted to become a person suitable for Sarge, those feelings quickly dissipated.

Seeing Amelia's satisfied smile, Marie nodded in understanding.

"Oh, right. That's just how you are, Amelia."

It was a day filled with incredibly memorable moments.

From now on, she would never leave Sarge's side. They could be together forever.

Considering that, she knew well that today wasn't the peak of her happiness but merely the beginning.

At the end of the day, as she and Sarge were gazing at the moon, Amelia vowed that she would do her absolute best to ensure their happiness lasted forever.

One day, shortly after the successful wedding ceremony, Amelia and Sarge were both summoned by Alexis.

Recently, Alexis had been very busy, and although he made a point of eating breakfast together with his family, he was often absent at dinner—the reason for that being that the princes' father, the king, had made it known that he wanted to abdicate soon.

Although his four sons had graduated from the magic academy and were now adults, Second Prince Est was not yet married and the king was still far from the age of retirement. However, the king had come into power when he was young and had been forced to confront several challenges, so he wished to leave the rest to his trustworthy sons and spend his remaining time quietly.

Crown Prince Alexis was certainly reliable, and his eagerly awaited first son had now been born. All three of his younger brothers would also remain in the royal family and had resolved to support him. The nations of this continent were on good terms with one another as well.

It was true that this was a favorable time for the king to abdicate.

In order to grant his father's wish, Alexis had started preparing to take the throne. Knowing Alexis was busy with all that, Amelia felt a little nervous about the fact that he had summoned them.

Once Alexis acceded to the throne, Sarge would be the brother of the king.

With Linus born, Sarge was now further away from the throne and had more free time than before. However, once he became the king's brother, he would probably become busy once again. As his wife, Amelia was fully committed to doing her best for the royal family.

However, what Alexis had to tell them was completely different

from what she had been expecting.

“You two are probably going to become even busier down the line, so you should take a holiday while you can. For about a month or so.”

Alexis explained that the holiday would be a wedding present from him and the other princes.

“Both of you continued your inspections and research even during the academy’s longer breaks, didn’t you? Naturally, you’ll need a guard to come with you, but you can go wherever you’d like.”

He even said they could go abroad. Unsure how to respond, Amelia looked up at Sarge. It was true that they had spent even their school holidays doing work, but that had partly been because they were interested in it.

But...

At any rate, although they might end up examining unique plants or doing magic experiments like they always did, a holiday with just the two of them was quite a charming idea. Would their destination be the Beltz Empire, or perhaps the agricultural superpower Janaki?

Contrary to Amelia’s guesses, however, Sarge said quietly, “In that case, let’s go to Amelia’s home, the Lenia domain.”

“What?” Amelia exclaimed unintentionally, not having expected him to give that sort of answer.

Alexis was just as surprised as she was.

“The Lenia domain is certainly a splendid place, but you don’t need to take a long holiday to go there.”

They wouldn’t be going out on official business or to observe another research institute; this would be a holiday during which they could do nothing for an entire month. Wouldn’t it be better for them to go somewhere they normally couldn’t go?

Despite Alexis’s attempts to persuade Sarge, he couldn’t change his brother’s mind.

“I’ve always wanted to spend some relaxing time there,” Sarge said, and his words reminded Amelia of the landscape painting in his room. He must have loved that place more than she had realized. In that case, there was no reason to hesitate.

“Amelia, for you, that would just be taking a trip back home. Are you okay with that?”

“Yes, of course.”

Sarge told Amelia that if there was somewhere she wanted to go, they would go there instead. But as long as she could spend time with Sarge, she was fine with going anywhere. In fact, she was happy to go back home, since she hadn’t been able to do so during her last long break from school. She gave her response, then hurriedly went to send a letter to her parents.

At this time of the year, they would have just finished planting various seeds and seedlings at the Lenia domain. From now through the summer, she and Sarge would be able to watch them grow.

The next day, after Amelia received a flustered but still welcoming response from her parents, she and Sarge departed for the Lenia domain.

It had also been a while since they had enjoyed a leisurely journey in a carriage. Sarge was enjoying the trip; he gazed out the window and occasionally stopped the carriage to look at some uncommon flowers he had spotted.

Kaid and Liliane were accompanying them as their guards, but the two knights were riding in a separate carriage alongside theirs, so Amelia and Sarge had their own carriage to themselves. The two of them had never been alone outside of the library before, save for in emergency situations. It was at times like these that Amelia fully realized they had gotten married and were now husband and wife.

After some time, they arrived in the Lenia domain, and Sarge had the carriage stop in the usual place. Kaid and Liliane's carriage stopped in a spot a little farther away, and the two of them watched over the newlywed couple. Amelia descended from the carriage after Sarge. She took a look around at the farmland of her birthplace, which she hadn't seen in a while.

"If I were not a member of the royal family, you and I would have inherited this land. Maybe we could have had a future like that," Sarge muttered almost to himself. Amelia looked up at him.

"Sarge..."

Had he dreamed of that sort of future?

To concern himself only with the development of the Lenia domain instead of the entire Kingdom of Bedeiht. She tried to imagine it, but she couldn't picture him doing that. He didn't seem like the type of person who could be contained within a mere rural territory.

Besides, they had Alexis, Est, and Julius, plus Sophia, Marie, and Chloe.

And even her cousin Sol and Meena. Kaid and Liliane too.

It was much better having all of those people by their side, like they did now.

"I'm happier with how things currently are," she told him. Sarge looked at her, then smiled gently.

"You're right. I am too. Shall we walk for a bit?"

"Yes."

Amelia walked side by side with Sarge. The wide expanse of farmland had been fully planted with crops. Sarge was looking out at that scenery, his gentle eyes filled with love.

Perhaps he would paint this scene one day.

Amelia imagined what that beautiful landscape painting would look like hanging in Sarge's room and took his hand as he walked ahead of her and entwined her fingers in his.

Almond flowers bloomed alongside the simple dirt path, which had been hardened by many footsteps.

These were the same flowers that had bloomed that one day many years ago, but the sight that stretched before Amelia's eyes now looked entirely different.



Extra Story: An Evening Together ~ Alexis and Sophia

It was a quiet night.

Crown Princess Sophia of the Kingdom of Bedeiht softly took hold of her son's tiny hand, and a gentle smile brimming with affection rose to her face.

Her newborn son was sound asleep. His adorable sleeping face filled her heart with love.

I never imagined I'd be able to welcome this child into the world so peacefully.

Ever since she tied the knot with Crown Prince Alexis, her mother-in-law, the queen, had repeatedly told her a certain thing: that raising a child with strong magic power required a considerable amount of resolve.

Alexis had very strong magical ability, and his child would undoubtedly inherit his power. Of course, Sophia was aware of that. Even if it was slightly dangerous, marrying the crown prince was the highest honor for someone born as a noblewoman of Bedeiht.

It's true that I was a little worried at first, but...

When Sophia had learned she was pregnant, her husband had been the more anxious one of the two of them. Alexis usually never let his dignified demeanor falter, but whenever Sophia felt just slightly unwell, he became so overprotective that he tended to her all night and into the morning.

Several years had passed since they married, but that was the first time Sophia had seen Alexis like that. Naturally, she had been bewildered at first. But after learning that his behavior was explained by what he had experienced in his early childhood, Sophia had come to feel that she couldn't reject his help.

I mean, I couldn't believe someone as strong as him would look so worried just because I was feeling unwell.

Alexis, who was born the eldest son of the royal family of Bedeiht, had magic so powerful that it surpassed even that of his own parents. When he was young, he hadn't yet had full command of that power, so there had been times when he'd lost control of it and destroyed things or injured someone.

No one had been more negatively impacted by his magic going wild than Alexis himself. The king, who could no longer bear to see

his son that way, had decided to isolate Alexis in one of the royal family's villas until his powers stabilized.

Alexis has never told me anything about that time. It must have been such a difficult experience that he can't speak about it easily, Sophia thought as she stroked her baby's head.

If they didn't have this magical tool Amelia had invented, then this child might have had to endure the same thing.

Maybe when Alexis had learned that Sophia was pregnant, he had assumed that his child would turn out the same way he had. He must have been very worried that carrying a baby with strong magic power would also have some negative effect on Sophia.

He had always been a person with strong love for his family. He paid careful attention not only to his wife Sophia but to his brothers' fiancées as well, watching over them to make sure they weren't having any sort of trouble.

Alexis's everyday self was the dignified, respectable crown prince. He boasted the strongest magic power in the kingdom and was always actively working, as if he never grew fatigued.

Occasionally Sophia caught sight of him doing something unbecoming a man of his position, but Alexis had a good understanding of his own abilities and refrained from doing anything reckless. That was why she felt secure in the knowledge that, even while she worried about him traveling from place to place, she would not have to fear the worst.

Today, however, Alexis had fallen asleep while sitting on the sofa.

"This is a rare sight," Sophia muttered. She left her place beside her baby, whom they had named Linus, and went to sit next to her husband.

After hearing that his youngest brother, Sarge, hadn't returned from his trip to the Beltz Empire, Alexis had gone to rescue him, bringing along Sarge's fiancée, Amelia. There, the circumstances had required him to expend a lot of magic power.

When he finally returned home, he had maintained his composure in front of his younger brothers until returning to his room, where he'd planted himself on the sofa and fallen asleep. Even before going to rescue Sarge, Alexis had been making repeated trips to and from the empire, so he must have been exhausted from those too.

Alexis was expected to grow even busier from now on. He hadn't told the other princes yet, but the king was hinting at abdicating soon. Although all his sons were adults now and he was still young for a king, he seemed to want to yield the crown to Alexis.

Furthermore, the king had inherited the crown when he was young and had borne the weight of the kingdom's affairs alone. He must have wanted to let his reliable sons handle the rest and live out

the remainder of his life in peace. The official announcement would not happen until further in the future, but in order to grant his father's wish, Alexis had started working towards inheriting the crown.

It made sense that Alexis would be so tired from all that.

Sophia was the only one whom he let see him like this. When she thought about that, her heart filled with a different kind of love than the love she felt for her son.

"You don't have to be so perfect all the time," she murmured as she stroked Alexis's golden hair.

All three of Alexis's younger brothers would remain in the royal family, and they had all promised to continue providing support to Alexis. And Sophia had also made friends she could count on, those being Marie, Amelia, and Chloe.

None of them would have to suffer alone. They would all help and support each other as they protected their kingdom.

That was what Sophia hoped for.

Extra Story: An Evening Together ~ Est and Chloe

Their engagement party was on the horizon.

Chloe was suddenly reminded of that fact while she was working on a school assignment in the library of the Bedeiht royal castle. The thought made her feel a bit restless. Chloe had come here to study from the kingdom in the south, Janaki, of which she was the fourth princess.

A lot had happened, but now, at last, she could be officially engaged to Bedeiht's second prince, Est. Chloe was delighted by that, but there were also two things she was worried about.

The first was how her friends would react when they heard the announcement. Chloe had not even told her friends at the academy of magic that she was a princess of Janaki, much less that she was engaged to Est.

Though I'm sure they know I came from abroad to study here...

Everyone in the Kingdom of Bedeiht had fair skin, so Chloe, with her brown skin, stood out quite a lot. Even though she had hidden her identity as a princess and was attending the academy as just another student, it must have been obvious at a glance that she was an exchange student.

Plus, the number of people who can use magic in Janaki has dwindled...

Chloe felt that the students at the academy *had* to know she was royalty, or at least closely related to royalty. Nevertheless, no one had asked Chloe about her identity; perhaps they assumed they shouldn't say anything, since her background hadn't been publicly announced. The very fact that they didn't ask made her sure that her friends were at least somewhat aware.

Prince Est even told me it was all right to tell my friends.

Despite that, she had yet to tell them anything. Now that she had finally succeeded in making friends, she was scared of losing them. But she felt she should be the one to tell them first, before her identity was officially announced.

The second thing Chloe was worried about was the dress currently being tailored for her engagement party. Crown Princess Sophia, Princess Marie, and Amelia had given her much advice regarding the dress.

When she was asked if she preferred a dress of Janaki design or Bedeiht design, Chloe didn't hesitate to choose Bedeiht.

In her home country of Janaki, people favored clothing that was easier to move around in and, perhaps because of the heat, exposed more skin. But when Amelia had come to Janaki on her diplomatic mission, the dress she was wearing had charmed Chloe, who had been wishing to wear something like that ever since.

However...

Chloe differed slightly in appearance from the citizens of Bedeiht. She was happy that a pretty dress was being made for her, but she was worried that it wouldn't look good on her.

Furthermore, everyone in Bedeiht's royal family was good looking, including her fiancé, Est, who was quite handsome. Chloe, however, was tall and had brown hair, which were ordinary features in Janaki. If she hadn't been born a princess, she would have just been the kind of girl who blended in with a crowd. When Chloe thought about standing next to her handsome fiancé in a dress that didn't suit her, she felt like running away.

"I wish I could run back home to Janaki..." she muttered without thinking. Then she heard the sound of a heavy object dropping, and she looked up.

"Chloe?" said a familiar voice.

She saw Est standing there at the entrance of the library. The sound she had heard had been him dropping all the books he'd been carrying.

"Prince Est, are you all right?" Chloe asked, rushing over to him.

Est's health had always been poor, and when he was a child, he hadn't been able to leave his room much. These days, his health was improving, and he could go about his daily life without any difficulty, but Chloe still worried over him.

"Are you in pain somewhere? Shall I call someone...?"

"I'm fine. More importantly, why did you say you want to go back to Janaki...?"

"Ah..."

Chloe looked away from him, embarrassed that he had heard what she'd muttered to herself.

"Please forget you heard that..."

It was all she could do to whisper those words.

"If this isn't what you want, we can always end our engagement."

"What?"

That was not the response Chloe had been expecting. His surprising words made her forget her embarrassment and look up at him.

"End...our engagement? Why?"

“I’m not a suitable partner for you. I’m much older than you, and my body is weak.”

“That is not true! Rather, I was thinking that I’m the one who is too childish and not a suitable partner for you. I do worry about your health, but I want to be by your side to support you!” Chloe told him desperately. She did not want to dissolve their engagement.

“Then why did you say you wanted to return to Janaki?”

At his question, Chloe explained that she was worried about whether her dress was going to look good on her, blushing bright red from embarrassment all the while. Est listened to her seriously without laughing her off.

“Princess Sophia has great fashion sense. There is no chance she would recommend a dress that won’t look good on you. If she’s chosen it for you, I have no doubts it’ll look becoming on you,” Est told her, smiling kindly to put her at ease. “I’m sure you’ll look pretty. I’m looking forward to it.”

“...Thank you.”

Est had completely dispelled her anxiety with only a few words.

His words may have been simple, but she felt she could believe them.

That must have been because Chloe genuinely trusted this man.

She could be engaged to this man.

And eventually, she could marry him.

That thought completely wiped away her uneasiness, allowing her to smile happily.

Extra Story: An Evening Together ~ Julius and Marie

After dinner, at which all four princes were present, Amelia and Sarge headed to the library. Marie made sure to tell them not to stay there too late and not to overdo it. She felt like she had been telling them that nearly every day since marrying Third Prince Julius and becoming a member of the royal family.

I feel like an overprotective mother, she thought with a giggle as she made her way back to her room.

Amelia seemed to feel bad about making her do that, but Marie didn't dislike looking after others in this way—not only Amelia, who was one year her junior, but also Sarge, who was her age and whom she viewed as a troublesome little brother. Since he actually had become Marie's brother-in-law, she wasn't exactly wrong about that.

When she returned to her room in high spirits, she noticed a few presents stacked on top of her desk.

“...Again, Julius?” she muttered with a sigh.

Julius, just like Marie, often took on the responsibility of looking after Sarge and Amelia and stopping them from pushing themselves too hard, which they tended to do. Julius was strict in some ways, but he was also a kind person who valued his family.

But...

Although he hadn't done so when they'd been engaged, Julius had begun spoiling Marie quite a lot after they officially became husband and wife.

He would regularly give her presents like this, and anytime he traveled abroad on official business, he would always bring her back a souvenir.

He must have really valued her. That thought made her happy, but getting gifts so frequently was starting to become a problem.

She decided to open the gifts. In a small box was a bejeweled ornament, and in a large box was a matching dress. The other day, Julius had gone to the Kingdom of Niida, a country with many mines and famous for its gemstones. He must have bought these there.

However, he had given her so many dresses already that there were still many she had yet to wear. Perhaps she should ask him to hold back on the gifts for a bit.

Right as she had that thought, Julius came to her room.

“Julius.”

She had just been about to go see him, so she made it to the door before her personal maid to let him in. Then, thinking her actions made it seem like she wanted to see him so badly that she couldn't even wait, she felt a twinge of embarrassment.

“Is something wrong, Marie?”

Marie's face was red. Concerned, Julius gently extended a hand towards her. Even though they were husband and wife now, they were newlyweds, so she still felt a little shy around him.

“Nothing's wrong. It's just, I was about to go see you, so I was surprised you came here.”

“Ah, I see,” Julius said, nodding with understanding. He picked up the hair ornament, which was sitting on Marie's desk, and put it in her hair. “Yeah, that looks nice. I thought it would look good on you.”

Although Marie had been thinking about asking him to stop giving her gifts, after hearing him say that with a smile on his face, she was struggling to muster the courage to bring it up.

“Thank you very much for the dress too. But, um...”

“I've also ordered a custom necklace, so that should be delivered later.”

“Pardon?”

Hearing that he had even ordered a necklace for her, Marie grew flustered.

“Um, Julius. This really is too many presents. I'm sure I look as if I like dressing extravagantly, but the truth is I really don't...”

For a while, due to Marie's gorgeous looks in addition to her parents' wealth, she was seen as a spendthrift and someone fond of ostentation. But the truth was that she liked to make her favorite clothes last a long time, and since her parents ran a business, they were quite a frugal family.

“Oh, I know that. I know you're a kind person who cares more about helping others and living a simple life than about your looks. But I just can't help wanting to give you gifts. I'm sure my older brothers and Sarge are the same way. It's in our nature to devote ourselves to the ones we love, so I hope you can accept that part of me.”

“What?”

Now that he mentioned it, Marie remembered that Sophia had a dedicated room as her closet.

Marie had assumed that things had only reached that point for Sophia because she was the crown princess, but now she realized she would naturally have to do the same if she kept receiving gifts at this pace.

“...You brothers really are hopeless, aren't you?”

Eventually, the day would come when Amelia and Chloe would have to worry about their own countless gifts. Marie's heart warmed at the thought, and her expression softened.

But just as Amelia treasured the ring that Sarge had given her, Marie treasured the magical tool bracelet that Julius had made for her more than anything.

No other piece of jewelry could even contend with it.

Nearly every day made Marie feel happy from the bottom of her heart. When she was still a student at the academy, spending her days alone, she had never imagined she would spend her days like this.

It's all thanks to Amelia.

Marie smiled as the face of her dear best friend came to mind.

Extra Story: An Evening Together ~ Sarge and Amelia

Reading thoroughly through documents and analyzing data—they were doing exactly what they would have done in the library, but in Sarge’s room. That fact alone made Amelia slightly nervous. She furtively looked at Sarge, who was sitting opposite her.

When they had been a betrothed couple, they had spent most of their time in the library in the castle’s private living quarters. But now that they were married, they had started to spend more time in his room.

Having said that, his room wasn’t much different from the library. It was filled with books and papers; in fact, the reason they had come straight here after dinner was that more of their materials were here than in the library. But for some reason, just being in Sarge’s room made her feel fidgety.

“Amelia?” He called her name suddenly, making her realize she had stopped working and had been staring at him the whole time.

“Ah, I’m sorry...” she said, looking down in embarrassment. Then she sensed him smile.

“How about we take a break? We could have some tea.”

“Oh, I’ll make it!”

Amelia stood up and moved to a corner of the room to brew some tea.

Each member of the royal family who resided in the castle’s private living quarters had their own personal maid. Even Amelia had been given her own maid once she started living here. The maid was a slightly older, kind, and reliable person. However, although Sarge was a prince, he had no maid in his room.

Since he wanted to be able to focus on his research, he had refused a maid, saying he didn’t need one. That was why he could at least make tea on his own, and he used magic to clean and organize his room. Sarge used magic to take care of several everyday tasks, which was probably the reason his magical skills were more diverse than his brothers’.

Perhaps because not many people came in and out of Sarge’s room, it was always quiet and didn’t have much of a lived-in feel. That was probably why Amelia felt it was like a library. She thought about that while she brewed the tea for the both of them, then handed

Sarge a tea cup.

“Thank you,” he said, looking away from his reading material to take the tea from Amelia. After he took a sip, his expression softened, and he looked around the room. Amelia followed his lead and did the same.

There were many books and papers lying about. Flower pots were lined up by the window, some filled with blooming plants that Amelia had never seen before. In the corner of the room were art tools, and several of Sarge’s paintings were scattered on the floor.

“My room has always been the only place I could be alone. The quiet, undisturbed time I spent here was always very important to me,” he told her in a soft tone.

Sarge valued his alone time so much that he had even refused to have a maid who would enter his room. Amelia remembered how, when they had just met, he would often leave behind his student escorts to move about on his own.

That must have been due to the seriousness of Bedeiht’s situation at that time. High expectations had been placed on Sarge’s research, and he had been working his hardest on his research in order to solve the nation’s food crisis. He needed a quiet space, lest his attention be diverted by other people.

Sarge shifted his gaze to Amelia, and when their eyes met, he smiled at her softly.

“But now, I feel much calmer having you with me. So much so that I can’t concentrate when I’m by myself. I never thought I’d feel this way.”

“Sarge...”

He felt at peace when they were together. Hearing him say that made her happier than anything, especially given how busy he was.

“I also feel at ease when we’re together. I wish we could have been together even earlier.”

She knew that was impossible, but she just blurted it out.

Rather than laughing at Amelia’s remark, Sarge instead revealed that he had felt the same. “I’ve also wished I could have been your fiancé from the start, Amelia,” he responded. “But I also think that if we had met under different circumstances, our relationship would be different too. I love you now, Amelia, so I’m happy with how we ended up.”

“...You’re right.”

Hearing him say he loved her so abruptly made her cheeks redden. Sarge’s smile deepened as he saw Amelia blush so innocently despite the fact that they were now married.

“What’s important now is the future. I want to value the time I spend with you and not just my research.”

He asked if there was something she wanted to do together, or somewhere she wanted to travel. Amelia looked over towards the corner of the room.

“I’d like to see you paint.”

“You want to see me paint?” Sarge looked a bit surprised, but then he quickly assented. “In that case, why don’t we paint something together? The timing is perfect. That flower should bloom tomorrow,” he said, pointing to a large bud.

Amelia had never seen a flower that looked like that before, so it must have been one that Sarge had selectively bred.

“Um, I’ve never painted anything before...” Amelia started, knowing she wouldn’t be able to paint as well as him. She was about to reject his idea for that reason, but then she reconsidered, feeling it was important for them to spend time together. “So, please, teach me what to do.”

“Right, of course,” he responded happily.

This way, they would spend more and more time together. She knew that when she looked back on those moments several years from now, they would have become important, treasured memories—memories that she cherished more than anything.

Amelia smiled as she looked at the flower bud. Their painting of this flower would leave a deep impression in their memories forever.

Afterword

Hello. This is Micoto Sakurai.

Thank you for picking up volume three of *A Royal Rebound: Forget My Ex-Fiancé, I'm Being Pampered by the Prince!*

This is the final volume of the series.

The fact that I have been able to continue this story, which was originally a completed story, in a second and third volume is all thanks to you readers. I have now had the opportunity to write about Amelia and Sarge's wedding, which I had regretfully been unable to include in volume two, bringing this story to a successful conclusion.

I still think fondly of how the title of this series was so long, it took up the entire character limit for social media announcements.

There are still things I'd like to write about Amelia and Sarge as husband and wife, and also about their children, so I hope I can do that in side or bonus stories.

I truly thank you for reading to the end of the story.

If you've enjoyed yourself even a little, that would make me very happy.

Also, to Kuroyuki-sensei, who created the illustrations: it's thanks to your charming character designs that I was able to continue this far. I was very moved seeing the happy couple on the cover of the volume and the illustration of their wedding.

Thank you.

To my editor: you've really become like family to me, and your careful review of my manuscript has taught me a lot. It's also thanks to you that the final book of the series could be published.

Thank you!

I believe a comic adaptation of this series is in the works, so please look forward to that too.

I hope we can meet again somewhere.

Micoto Sakurai



3

Micoto Sakurai
ill. Kuroyuki

A Royal Rebound:

*Forget My
Ex-Fiancé,*

I'm Being

Pampered

by
the

Prince





Kaid Eted

Sarge's knight guard.

Liliane Alito

Amelia's knight guard.

Sarge

The fourth prince of the Kingdom of Beekit.

"I'm probably just repeating the same thing. But please, don't start disliking me."

"That would be impossible. You don't need to worry about that. I actually think I'm the one who should be careful not to make you fed up with me."



"I love you.
Meeting you
has brought
light back into
my life."

"Your strong
sense of curiosity,
your humility,
your ability to
concentrate,
and your kindness,
which prevents
you from ignoring
people in trouble."

"And most
of all, your
unbreakable
strength even
when others
treat you wrongly.
I love everything
about you."

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A Royal Rebound: Forget My Ex-Fiancé, I'm Being Pampered by
the Prince! Volume 3
by Micoto Sakurai

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